

# **The Well of the Moon**

## **From Rondaies Mallorquines by Mossen Antoni Maria Alcover**

Once upon a time there was once a king who had three daughters; the eldest was called Anne, the second Mary, and the youngest Catherine. They suffered the weakness that nearly all women suffer from; they wanted to look prettier than they actually were. All three had pretty enough faces and were shapely elsewhere; but they wanted to look even better.

They searched everywhere for some way of becoming more comely, and one day they met a fairy and immediately surrounded her asking what they had to do to become more beautiful.

The fairy peered at them closely. "Are you not the King's daughters?" she said. "Yes, we are." "Very well," said the fairy, "go to The Well of the Moon, pull up a bucket of water, pour the water all over yourselves from top to toe, and you will discover what good it does you." So the three young women, as if their shoes were alight, shot straight off to The Well of the Moon; they pulled up the bucket of water and poured it all over themselves.

But instead of becoming more beautiful they turned into three stones.

The fairy had followed them and came soon after to the Well of the Moon; she picked up the three stones and threw them into the well.

Then she ran off like a bullet from a gun.

She bore malice against the King because he didn't like fairies; he was frightened that they might harm to him or his family. And so it came to pass, poor man. You can imagine how worried he was when his three daughters didn't return. A day passed, and two days, and three; and then a week passed, and another week, and a month; and still his daughters did not come back. The King and Queen were desperate, naturally enough. They tore at their hair. They hit their heads against the walls. They thought they were going mad.

Finally the King issued proclamations saying that any single man who could discover the whereabouts of the three princesses could marry one of them and would be heir to the Crown.

I can't tell you how many young bachelors went off searching for the King's daughters, dreaming of marrying the prettiest and becoming King. It is not surprising that so many went off utterly determined to succeed in their quest. Indeed, all the young men in the kingdom went searching all over the place for the King's three daughters, but none could find them - not even the slightest trace.

Among those searching were three brothers belonging to one of the poorest families: the first was called Peter...

the second, Paul...

and the youngest, Bernard.

Peter was the first to be smitten, and he said to his father: "Father, I am thinking of going to search for the King's three daughters. Imagine how lucky it would be for us if I could find them: I could marry one of them, and when the King died I should become King." "That's true" said his father, "but what is the likelihood of your finding them?" "Well, probably not much," said Peter, "but I might". Anyway if I don't find them I shall only have lost my footsteps." "Alright," said his father: "you may go and satisfy your desire, and may God help you find these three blessed daughters of the King!" "Amen," said Peter and off he went.

Walking, walking, first one way and then another, because had no idea which way to go, he came across an old woman shuffling along, bent double, with her face almost touching the ground.

When she saw Peter she sidled up to him and said: "Oh, young man, spare me some small thing for the love of God!" "This is no time for giving" said Peter. "I have nothing for you. This is my time to receive not to give." "And have you no compassion for a poor old woman?" she said. "I don't think that you be very successful."

The old woman went on her way, and Peter as well, but he had no luck: and although he toiled to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south, he could find absolutely no clue as to the whereabouts of any of the King's daughters.

Some time later Paul made the same kind of approach to his father. "Father, do you know what I have been thinking?" "Who is able to know what other people are thinking?" said his father. "Well," Paul said, "I have thought of going to try to find the King's lost three daughters. There is a big prize for the finder." "Don't you know what will happen to you?" his father said. "You will be like Peter who went off in search of them, and he has come back with his tail between his legs." "Alright," Paul replied, "but if I can't find them, I will only have lost my footsteps" "That's true," said his father. "Well, then," Paul went on, "if you will give me your blessing, I will go; and if I don't succeed I will have lost little!" "Alright, Off you go then!" said his father.

And Paul went off searching the world, to see if he could find any news or word of the King's daughters, who had disappeared without trace. Walking, walking first to the east, then to the west, to the north and to the south, and asking, asking everywhere about the three girls, he couldn't find anybody knew anything about what had happened to them.

Well, what do you know? One day Paul came across the same old woman, bent double, with her face almost touching the ground. And, believe it or not, she shuffled up to Paul saying: "Oh, young man, spare me some small thing for the love of God!" "This is no time for me to be handing out small things." said Paul. "I am destined to receive, not to give! Perhaps you should try someone else" And he left the old woman standing there. She looked at him for a bit before saying to him: "I shall be very surprised if you have much success."

The old woman was telling the truth: Paul nearly dropped down dead searching for the King's three daughters, but he could find neither news nor any trace of them.

Then Bernard was stung by the same fly as Peter and Paul had been, so he went up to his father and said: "Father, do you know the thoughts that I have had?" "To go off searching for the King's daughters, just like your two brothers?" "You have guessed correctly!" said the young man. "I have the courage to try to find those good daughters of the King." "Peter and Paul also had courage," said his father, "and you can see that neither has succeeded in finding them." "That is so," Bernard replied, "but what else can I say to you? I believe I shall succeed where they have failed. So if you don't forbid me to, I shall try." "No, my boy," said his father; "I will not deprive you of your attempt. You may as well go like the other two. God give you more success, my son, than the others had." "Amen!" said Bernard, and went straight off.

Walking, walking, first one way, then another, searching and searching for the King's daughters, he one day came upon that same old woman, bent double with her face almost touching the ground. When she saw Bernard she approached to him and said: "Oh, young man, give me some small thing for the love of God!" "For the love of God," said Bernard, "one can't refuse anything. I can't give you much, because I am poor, but we can share what little I have."

He had a loaf of bread, a Mallorcan red sausage, and three coins in his purse; he gave the old woman half the loaf, half the sausage, and one of the coins. He insisted on tossing the remaining coin and it fell in his favour.

"Oh, young man," the old woman said, "You don't know just how much good you have done yourself with the things that you have given me out of your poverty. You look to me as if you are searching for the King's three daughters who are lost and cannot be found." "You are absolutely right, little sister," Bernard replied. "How on earth did you know?" "Ah!" she said. "If I told tell you that, you would know as much as me." "And are you able to tell me where the King's daughters are?" said Bernard. "I certainly am!" said the old woman. "Oh, what an enormous favour you would be doing me if you were to tell me!" exclaimed Bernard.

"For the kind heart that you have shown me, I will tell you." said the old woman. "The three daughters of the King were sent by a wicked fairy to soak themselves with water from The Well of the Moon, having been told that by so doing they would become more beautiful; but instead they were turned into three stones, which the fairy then threw into the well. They are guarded by a snake, a lion, and an evil demon ; These creatures will

consume anybody who goes near them, unless he can throw into their faces a splash of water from the seven wells that surround The Well of the Moon which are about an hour's walk away. What is good is that the snake is coiled up like a length of rope on top of the stone that it is guarding, and it never moves as long as nobody approaches it.

And the lion is the same; it lies alert on the stone that it guards and it never moves so long as nobody approaches it.

And the demon does much the same; he sits on the stone with his tail wound around himself and he never moves unless somebody comes near.

"Now you have to get a jug and fill it with water from the seven wells that I told you about and you must go down into The Well of the Moon with the jug which you must carefully hide. When you are at the bottom you must throw some water at the snake which will explode and at that the stone will turn back into the King's eldest daughter Anne. Then you throw some more water at the lion, which will explode with a roar and at that the stone will turn back into the King's second daughter Mary. Then you throw the remainder of the water at the evil demon, who will give a screech and a bang and will start prancing about on his stone. You must immediately jump for the demon's left ear and with your teeth and bite half of it off; you must put away carefully the piece of his ear that you have bitten off into your pocket. The demon will leap back crying: "I curse the person who advised you to do this! " The stone will turn into the King's youngest daughter Catherine. The demon will plead with you to give him back the piece of his ear that you have bitten off, but you must be careful not to give it to him until he gets you all out of The Well of the Moon and takes you to the King's house." Imagine Bernard's feelings when he heard all these complicated instructions from the old woman. He knelt in front of her and kissed her hands, but she suddenly vanished into thin air.

As you will obviously realise, Bernard at set off at once for The Well of the Moon, which the old woman had described as being among some very craggy mountains, in the middle of a deep valley. The well had neither posts, nor handle, nor a rope to draw water because the wicked fairy who had thrown the King's daughters into the well had also thrown in the bucket, the rope, the handle and the posts; she left only the well frame itself because it was built of stones that were much too big and heavy for her to move by herself.

Bernard listened carefully in case he might hear noises or voices inside the well, but he could hear nothing at all. He thought it must be the Well of the Moon, as he had followed the old woman's directions carefully, but he still had some doubts. He sat down to think what he should do next, when along came a shepherd boy driving a flock of sheep while he followed along behind playing his flute - tooty toot - tooty toot!

Bernard stopped him, saying: "Can you tell me, shepherd, what is the name of this well?" "It is The Well of the Moon," said the shepherd boy, stopping his playing for a moment; and he had hardly uttered his reply when he began his playing again - tooty-toot - tooty-toot! and he disappeared after his sheep as carefree as can be.

What did Bernard do next? He set off for the King's house to ask for a jug and some rope so that he could bring back the King's three daughters, now that he knew where they were.

He presented himself to the King and said: "My King, is it true that Your Royal Majesty has made an proclamation which says that if a single man finds Your Royal Majesty's three daughters he may marry one of them and, with her as his wife, will become the heir to the Crown?" "Yes, it is true," said the King. "In which case," said Bernard, "I have come to tell you that I know where your three daughters are." "What are you telling me?" exclaimed the King. "Just what you heard, my King!" replied Bernard.

"Look, young man," said the King. "Don't deceive me, for the love of God, for if you did we would make a knapsack out of your skin." "Don't worry, my King," said Bernard, "Would I be so stupid as to make this up? If so then I admit I should deserve any punishment you like if I were to try to hoodwink Your Royal Majesty." "Then tell me," said the King, "if you need any help in finding these three girls of mine; three mirrors of my soul." "I need a jug and a good length of brand new rope." said Bernard. The King arranged for him to have what he asked for, and Bernard, with the jug and with the rope coiled over one shoulder and under the other arm, set off for The Well of the Moon.

Bernard's conversation with the King and what was said was overheard by a group of young men - those who were most anxious to be son-in-law to the King and heir to the Crown. They conspired with each other and said among themselves: "Can you see this country bumpkin finding these three girls when we could not? But just suppose he did find them: it would be terrible to have as King a peasant who can't be worth the straw he sleeps on." When they finished their plotting, they decided to follow Bernard at a discreet distance and to prevent him, by any means at their disposal, from rescuing the three princesses and delivering them to the King; they would rather kill him than let such a thing happen. At that, a party of these young men set off, following Bernard at a good distance, but without losing sight of him.

And as for Bernard; when he arrived once again at The Well of the Moon he listened as before for any noise coming from the well. He heard nothing, so he went off in search of the seven wells that the old woman had told him about, so that he could fill his jug with their water. These Wells were scattered all around the mountains; Bernard found them one by one a day at a time. He let his jug down with the rope and from each well he pulled up enough water to have the jug filled with an equal quantity from each of the seven wells; and after finding all seven of them - he went back with his jug to The Well of the Moon.

The gang of young men were watching him from a safe distance, and they were saying to each other: "Let's see what this starling gets up to! We must watch him very carefully." And as they spied on him they saw how he uncoiled the length of rope, how he tied one end to the rocks at the mouth of the well, and how he went down into the darkness with his water jug, clinging to the rope. The young men came closer, so that if Bernard should come out with the King's three daughters they would be able to surround him and take the girls from him, by force if necessary.

Bernard, meanwhile was climbing further and further down. The rope was very long, but its length was running out and still he couldn't see the well bottom.

The well widened bit by bit until he couldn't see the sides; it was a terrifyingly large cavern. He came to the end of the rope but still he couldn't feel the bottom with his feet. He looked hard and saw something indistinct, so he let go of the rope and landed on his feet on the ground.

He looked and looked all around; his eyes were becoming more accustomed to the dark and he was able to make things out, and he found he was standing among the three large stones. On one of them was the snake coiled up like a length of rope; on another there was the lion; and on the third the evil demon.

The first thing about these three creatures that attracted Bernard's attention were their eyes, which glowed like coals.

Then Bernard placed himself in the hands of God and of all the saints and lady saints of his devotions, girded his loins and said: "Now for the explosions!" He took the lid off his jug and threw a splash of water from the seven wells onto the snake's head.

Then - splash! - another generous amount onto the lion's head.

and then - splash! - he threw all the water remaining in the jug onto the head of the evil demon.

When the water from the seven wells touched the snake and the lion those two creatures exploded with enormous bangs, and at the same time the two stones came to life, stood upright and turned into Anne and Mary, the two elder daughters of the King.

The evil demon, as soon as he felt the water from the seven wells on his face, made a bang and jumped at Bernard, but Bernard was ready for him and took a bite from the creature's ear, and he had bitten the top off before the demon realised what was happening.

That demon, when Bernard had bitten off the piece of ear, was like Samson after his hair had been cut and he did not even have the strength to lift three bundles of rye. The demon was sprawling on the ground bellowing

and roaring till the whole place shook, but it was plain that he no longer had any power against Bernard who wasn't even looking in his direction.

What Bernard was staring at very closely was the stone on which the evil demon had been sitting, because as soon as he had jumped at Bernard the stone stood upright, just like the other two, and turned into Catherine, the most bewitching and the most beautiful of the King's daughters.

Then the three princesses knelt before Bernard, crying out: "Oh, young man, you have saved our lives! May God's reward be as bountiful as our gratitude to you. Tell us what you want from us." "What do I want?" said Bernard, "I want to get you out of here and take you back to your father, the King." "Do you mean that you knew we were the King's daughters?" they cried. "It is because of this knowledge that I came to rescue you, at the risk of my own life," Bernard replied.

While they were talking the evil demon, still lying on the ground, kept on repeating: "Bernard, give me back the piece of my ear that you have bitten off! Give it back to me, Bernard. It's no use to you, and I need it badly. Give it back to me, I say! Don't be so cruel! Give it back to me!"

"We'll deal with that later," said Bernard. "I'll give you back the piece of your ear if you can get me, with these three girls, to the King's house." "Do you promise me that if I get you all to the King's house you will give me back the piece of my ear?" "My word of honour!" said Bernard. "Very well," said the Devil, "I will take you at once". He whistled with all the strength he could muster, and immediately there was a great noise of flapping wings.

It was an enormous gathering of crows, kites, vultures and eagles, which came tumbling into The Well of the Moon, and surrounded the evil demon, crying: "You haven't told us yet what you want us to do." "I will tell you right now," the evil demon said. "Bernard, do you see that sheet of canvas hanging in the corner?" Bernard went over to it and it was a canvas sheet just as the demon had said. "Bring it over here Bernard. Unfold it carefully; then all four of you get onto it, holding hands and take care not to let go." Bernard and the three Princesses did exactly as they were told. "Are you ready?" said the evil demon. "Yes," all four replied. "Right ho!" he said to the swarm of crows, kites, vultures and eagles. "Take this canvas sheet in your beaks and carry it at once to the forecourt of the King's house!" Believe it or not, all those birds grabbed the canvas in their beaks, spread their wings and flew off up the well, and on to the King's house like a hundred thousand bolts of lightning.

You can imagine what a surprise this was for the gathering of young men waiting at the mouth of the well when Bernard flew out with the King's three daughters, who they planned to grab. When they saw the huge flight of crows, kites, vultures and eagles going down into the well, and soon afterwards coming out again carrying Bernard and the King's daughters through the air, they were speechless, confounded.

Well, what do you know? The swarm of crows, kites, vultures, and eagles made such good speed that they were soon before the King's house.

They came down to earth slowly, and the King's daughters stepped off the canvas. Bernard threw the piece of the demon's ear into it, saying: "Take this; it belongs to your master. Please give it to him." "Do you want anything else?" the birds asked. "Nothing more!" Bernard replied. And the birds all flew off to The Well of the Moon, taking back to the demon the canvas with the piece of his ear in it. When the demon placed it onto his torn ear it healed at once. Then the crows, kites, vultures and eagles all flew off, carried away by the four winds.

Now you can imagine what happened at the King's house. Everyone was bursting with happiness and joy, particularly the three princesses and the King and Queen.

The King took Bernard to one side and said: "Do you have any brothers?" "Two," said Bernard. "Single or married?" said the King. "Single," said Bernard. "Then go and bring them here!" Bernard rushed off and returned with his two brothers...

...and the King said to the three brothers: "My three daughters are for you, one each. But Bernard must choose first, and he will be the heir to the Crown." So Bernard chose Catherine. Peter took Anne, and Paul, Mary. They were married and there was a wonderful wedding feast and a lively ball and fiestas and more fiestas, and more feasting. And it is still going strong if they haven't yet finished!