

The Blue Rose:

A folktale from China

Source: Rose Stories; Jean Gordon

Long ago in China there lived an Emperor who had but one daughter. She was beautiful and intelligent and admired for her exquisite singing. The emperor was getting old and wanted to see his daughter wed before he passed on. But his wonderful daughter could not just marry anyone. The emperor had to be sure that the man she married would be worthy of her.

He announced that the man who wished to marry his daughter must first find a blue rose. Roses grew wild in China at that time and there were white, yellow, orange, pink and red roses but no one had ever seen a blue rose. The Emperor was sure that whoever could find such a flower would be a very special man indeed.

It wasn't long before a rich merchant came to ask for the hand of the princess. He had with him a blue rose but the princess refused the rich merchant and exposed the rose as a fake – a white rose cleverly dyed a deep blue.

The next man to claim the hand of the princess was a brave warrior. He brought with him a beautiful blue sapphire carved by his servants in the likeness of a full-blown rose. The emperor and the princess congratulated him but shook their heads.

Then before the emperor appeared the Lord Chief Justice with a porcelain bowl painted for him by an expert artist. On the surface the artist had painted a blue rose so delicate and life like that it looked at first inspection to be a real blue rose. The emperor was impressed and the princess gasped in awe, but it was not what they were looking for.

One evening as the princess walked in the garden she heard a wandering minstrel singing on the other side of the palace wall.

She sat and listened to the minstrel's beautiful voice. And as he sang a love song her body tingled and her face flushed with pleasure for even though she knew he could not see through the walls she fancied he was singing to her. She was overcome with such passion and desire that she too began to sing the love song.

The minstrel on the other side of the palace walls listened to her sweet voice. He too was overcome with passion and desire. The next song he sang was a proposal of marriage.

The princess sang to him, a song that told him about the blue rose.

As she sang tears fell from her eyes because she knew a mere wandering minstrel would not know how to find such a rare and wonderful thing as a blue

rose. But the song that came back was a song that promised to present such a rose to the Emperor the very next day.

The princess could hardly sleep that night. When the minstrel appeared in court she recognised him instantly though she had not set eyes on him before. His voice had told her so much about him. He was tall, as she had known he would be and his eyes when they met hers were kind. He held in his hand a beautiful rose, not a blue rose but a handsome white rose that had surely been picked from the palace garden.

He held the rose out to the princess.

“The blue rose,” he said simply. The sound of his voice thrilled the princess.

The Emperor was angry.

“Blue indeed!” he said.

But the princess turned to her father and spoke in a soft voice.

“The rose is blue, father.”

There were protests from the court.

“The rose is white,” they cried.

The princess reached out and took the rose from the minstrel.

“The rose is blue,” she repeated.

The Emperor knew his daughter well and respected her wisdom.

He declared the rose to be blue. The princess and the minstrel were married and I guess you know what colour roses they grew in their garden.