



# The King of the Golden River

*John Ruskin , Maria Louise Kirk (Illustrator)*

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A fairy tale of what happened to two men who tried to get rich in evil ways and of how the fortune they sought came to their younger brother, whose kind and loving heart prompted him to right action. Widely regarded as a masterpiece of 19th century stories for children. Includes four black and white illustrations by Maria L. Kirk. Suitable for ages 8 and up.

## The King of the Golden River Details

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Author : John Ruskin , Maria Louise Kirk (Illustrator)

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# From Reader Review The King of the Golden River for online ebook

**Althea Ann says**

\*JOHN RUSKIN, 'The King of the Golden River'

This is the only work of fiction that the prolific and multi-talented Ruskin wrote. However, it manages to encapsulate a great many of the ideals that we think of today, when we think of Ruskin. It has the emphasis on 'Christian' mercy and charity, generosity over greed, and, to an almost distracting degree, the love of the beauties of nature. Indeed, the main 'message' of the tale is that natural bounty is what should be valued more than gold.

The piece wraps its morals in the tale of a young boy and his two cruel and greedy brothers. When a generous act leads to the youngest brother being granted the secret of 'how to turn a river to gold,' he confides in his siblings - but their lack of charity leads to their demise; leaving the reward for the sorely put-upon but unfailingly upstanding hero.

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**K.D. Absolutely says**

## **Gluck's Ten Life Enriching Lessons for Grownups:**

*I normally read children's books during Christmastime. Not only to catch up with my Reading Challenge (I am behind by 9 books as of this writing), but also, most of children's books have life lessons that can be good reminders for the coming year. New Year always means new beginning, new hope... As to why I am listing the ten lessons instead of my usual reviews, let me give you the reason. Do you remember when you were still in school and after reading a story in class, the teacher asked you what was the lessons you learned from it? So, in this year's series of children's books, I will try to list the ten lessons I was reminded while reading a certain book. So, this is my test to myself. I try to write down 10 lessons I got from the viewpoint of the main character in the book who is a child.*

- 1) **Be kind: give until it hurts.** Gluck, now on top of the mountain, has only a bottle of water and he is thirsty. When he is about to drink, he sees a dying man, he allows the man to drink 2/3 of it. Then he sees a child begging for water, he gives him some too. Real thirsty now, what is left with him is just 5 drops of water but he sees a frail dog and is about to die, so he drops all the 5 drops to the dog's tongue. (view spoiler)
- 2) **You cannot choose your relatives but you can choose what kind of person you want to be.** Gluck has two elder brothers who are mean but he is kindhearted pure soul. He chose to be different and even helped each of them and put their comfort ahead of his own. In the end, he was given the golden river.
- 3) **Respect Mother Nature.** Schwartz and Hans challenge Esquire (the Southwest Wind) and the latter destroys everything the Black Brothers have. No matter how wealthy we are, when Nature strikes back, nothing can protect us. This is happening now with all the floods due to typhoon or tornado: it does not matter whether you are in a third world or first world country. If it floods big time, you suffer big time too.
- 4) **Beware of people in disguise.** True to most fairy tales, the powerful ones like wizards, fairies, kings, etc

come in disguise and they test your response to a make-or-break situations. This can happen to us anytime: you don't know who you can bump into while walking inside the mall or while rushing to your train ride. In the office, you don't know whether your peer now will be your boss later. This world is full of uncertainties and we better be always ready.

5) **Invest on doing good deeds.** In relation to #4, focus on good deeds. We reap what we sow. During the first encounter, Gluck accidentally releases The King of the Golden River as he is just trying to use the cup that he has inherited. When the King complains about being hot while inside the cup, Gluck takes pity so he gives in. That single act of kindness endears him to the King.

6) **Save water.** Except Esquire, all the other magical characters in the book pretend to be in need of water to continue living. There is a message underneath that water has always been important in this world. Anyway, 80% of earth is basically water. I think 95% of human body is also water too. We cannot leave without drinking for 3 days but we can last without eating for 45 days.

7) **It's the thought that counts.** We normally hear this during gift-giving, right? What is more important really is not the gift or the actual thing but it is the feeling behind the gift. In this book, the holiness of the water whose 3 drops the person needs to throw into the waterfall not really means that the water should have been blessed by a priest. But it should be the water that has not been denied to the people desperately asking for it.

8) **Money can turn brothers against each other.** This is very true. Schwartz and Hans are very close to each other. They run their business together, drink together and maltreat their brother Gluck together. However, they lost their riches and have to try doing another job - that of being blacksmiths. Their trade is a failure so when they heard about the chance of having a river with gold in it, they become greedy and fight in a duel.

9) **Prepare for the unexpected.** Who would expect that there could be a glacier on top of a mountain when it is not even winter? Who would have thought that a flask of water is not enough for a day trip when what is needed is just 3 drops of it?

10) **Do a marketing research before you venture in a certain business.** In the book, after the Black Brothers lost their fortunes to the winds, they turn themselves into blacksmiths and they sell their bronze-gold creations. However, the people rejected them because they want pure gold...I know, right? I am pushing this too far just to complete my ten lessons. Hah! But I am trying hard because I am enjoying this. I am reliving those classroom experiences I had when the teacher would read a short fairy tale and would go around the room asking us her students for lessons learned. Excuse me but I am having fun. Anyway, it's Christmas.

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## Suvi says

Combining fairy tale and etiological myth, this story of the Victorian art critic Ruskin has familiar motifs found in fairy tales (the number three, bad siblings vs. good siblings, a quest, goodness is rewarded and selfishness is punished), and it apparently worked for contemporary audience, because the story sold out three editions and became an instant classic.

I didn't find the story particularly interesting. Under all the flowery prose the plot is quite simple, and

reminds me of fairy tales of lesser quality I've been reading lately. I don't see the kind of charm and magic that would make this memorable, even though there's nothing atrociously bad either. To be fair, Ruskin wrote this for his future wife and never intended this to be published, but maybe his friends wanted his work to be known, who knows.

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## Markus says

There are many starting points within the fantasy genre. J. R. R. Tolkien is often, with good reason, regarded as the father of fantasy, despite the fact that there was a vast expanse of stories before his time. Going further back, one can find the early 20th century classics that inspired the master, and even further back, George MacDonald's legendary *The Princess and the Goblin*. Before all of them, all the way back to the year 1841, John Ruskin wrote *The King of the Golden River*.

I'm choosing this as the point from which to base my fantastical reading ambitions. Even prior to this tale, fantasy in some shape or form had always been a part of any culture, but this is in many ways the breakthrough of modern fantasy, although it never achieved commercial success.

*The King of the Golden River* tells the tale of three brothers and their quest for riches, aided by mythic and magical factors. It's much more a classical fairytale than it is a fantasy epic, but it nevertheless was an important stepping stone for later fantasy authors to climb on.

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## Chris says

"The King of the Golden River was written in 1841, at the request of a very young lady, and solely for her amusement, without any idea of publication..." The very young lady was the twelve-year-old Effie Gray and the writer was John Ruskin, ten years her senior. Ruskin was eventually to marry Effie in 1848 but the marriage foundered and was annulled, Effie then marrying the artist John Everett Millais. All that turbulence was in the future, however, and Effie must have been delighted with her present, along with later generations too after the tale was published in 1851.

The Brothers Grimm had issued the first edition of their *Children's and Household Tales* back in 1812, initiating a public enthusiasm for what were called fairy tales by English-speakers. Ruskin gave a nod to German-speaking primacy in this genre by setting his story in 'Stiria' or Styria, a mountainous region straddling modern Austria and Slovenia. Like many of the Grimms' tales (which the brothers were continually re-writing and 'improving' in successive editions) there is a strong moral dimension to Ruskin's literary tale which has led commentators to label it a fable or parable. Who knows if the young Euphemia was aware of the overt import of Ruskin's morality tale or whether she instinctively accepted it as natural corollary of prevailing Victorian values, values shared by many readers today.

In five chapters (no genuinely oral folktale would have chapters!) the tale is told of the three Black Brothers, Hans (that is, Johannes, John in English), Schwartz (in German this simply means 'black') and Gluck ('luck'). Many of the traditional fairytale tropes are in place: the youngest brother is the last but not the least; he who shows compassion without expectation of reward will be rewarded; supernatural helpers are on hand to offer guidance or punishment. The two older brothers, grasping and cruel, are unwelcoming of South-

West Wind, Esquire, and thus suffer retribution in the loss of their farm and livelihood. They don't learn their lesson, however, and when they move to town to become goldsmiths their greed results in near penury. Into this potential disaster there appears to Gluck the King of the Golden River in very singular form, with the promise of riches for the one who succeeds in completing a task to the letter.

“Whoever shall climb to the top of that mountain from which you see the Golden River issue, and shall cast into the stream at its source three drops of holy water, for him, and for him only, the river shall turn to gold. But no one failing in his first, can succeed in a second attempt; and if any one shall cast unholy water into the river, it will overwhelm him, and he will become a black stone.”

This being an improving fairy tale the reader may guess the final outcome.

*The King of the Golden River* isn't perfect — the pacing is occasionally uneven, the odd explanation is rushed, and we miss the formulaic repetition of wording which is such a satisfying feature of oral tales. But this is a narrative that is compelling and which lingers in the memory, not least the environmental messages which apply even more urgently today.

My memories are enhanced by the original distinctive line illustrations by Richard Doyle which graced several re-publications over the decades, but the story has proved popular with several other artists such as Arthur Rackham and Charles Stewart providing colour as well as monochrome images. Did Effie rely solely on Ruskin's words to create the scenes in her mind's eye or did Ruskin himself provide some illustrations, now lost? The children's author Diana Wynne Jones recounts how as a child evacuated to the Lake District during the Second World War she inadvertently rubbed out some line drawings, mostly of flowers, that she'd discovered in a cottage: they turned out to be by John Ruskin. It's sheer speculation of course, but it's tempting to wonder if they included sketches for that fairy tale he wrote for another little girl, almost exactly a century before.

<http://wp.me/s2oNj1-river>

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## **Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says**

Kindle and Gutenberg freebie, a novelette for those who love old-fashioned fairy tales.

I grew up with this delightful fable, written in 1841 by John Ruskin, and set in the lovely mountainous Styria, part of Austria. In the traditional way, there are three brothers, the oldest two wicked and selfish and the youngest one (Gluck, meaning "luck") goodhearted.

One day Gluck, against his brothers' orders, lets a soaking wet little man into their home to warm himself. When the two older brothers Hans and Schwartz (aka the Black Brothers) find out, they insult the little man and throw him out. Bad move: the man was actually the Southwest Wind, who they've now deeply offended, and this is the beginning of terrible luck for the brothers. The Southwest Wind uses his influence with the other winds to turn the brothers' fertile valley into a dry wasteland.

Since farming is no good any more, the older brothers become goldsmiths. Gluck has a beloved heirloom, a golden mug shaped like a bearded man's head. Hans and Schwartz steal it away to melt it down for their

business. But when Gluck, following their orders, goes to pour the melted gold from his mug out of the crucible to shape it into bars, it magically turns into a golden dwarf, the King of the Golden River.

The dwarf king offers Gluck a challenge: whoever climbs the mountain to the source of the Golden River and throw into it three drops of holy water, for him and him only the river will "turn to gold." But if the person throws in unholy water, they'll turn into a black stone. Under pressure from his brothers (where's that gold??), Gluck tells Hans and Schwartz about the dwarf's story and his challenge ... and things get interesting from there.

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## **Stina says**

Book #79 for 2017

GenreLand: December - Fantasy

Book Riot's Read Harder: A book set more than 5,000 miles from Fort Collins

PopSugar (max. 3):

- A book with pictures
- A book with a family member term in the title
- A book with an eccentric character

The Legendary Book Club of Habitica's Ultimate Reading Challenge: A book with a family-member term in the title

Better World Books:

- A book that's more than 100 years old
- A book with a color in the title
- A book set in a place you want to visit (Stiria)
- A book under 200 pages

My Personal Reading Challenge: A book at least 100 years older than you

Tina came through for me on New Year's Eve! That's the night I go to Tina's party and hide in her library in a last-ditch effort to complete reading challenges for the year. In this case, I walked in the door and demanded a book short enough to be read in one sitting that was at least 100 years older than me. Inside of 10 minutes, she had me settled with a plate of food, a glass of wine, a cat, and this book.

This particular volume listed no copyright info, but it had a library stamp in the front cover from 1911, and the foreword stated that the story was originally "written in 1841, at the request of a very young lady, and solely for her amusement, without any idea of publication." Some Goodreads entries suggest that the story first saw publication approximately 10 years later.

This is an overtly Christian fairy tale, but it's the nice kind of Christian, not the GOP version. It's rather predictable, in the usual way of fairy tales, but I enjoyed the Victorian language and watching the story unfold. There are some really nice lessons here about charity, kindness, compassion, and true wealth.

And the true moral of the story: Always party with lit majors.

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## **Kalaam Juarez says**

I like that Gluck gave water to everyone who needed it, and that the jerks became stones.

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## **Gina Johnson says**

A very short, charming story I read to Grace. The language is very rich and I did have to explain a few words but we both liked the story. (Ambleside year 1 free read)

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## **Colin Jones says**

My favorite part is when Gluck finds a dog at the top of the mountain and gives him water. It's a good book.

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## **GoldGato says**

Words by John Ruskin + art by Iassen Ghiuselev = treasure. This book is one reason why I collect the printed word and why my shelves strain with the weight of beautiful children's volumes. Ruskin wrote this fairytale/fable for his future wife (she was 12 when he put words to paper) as an example of how nature reacts to the actions taken by humans.

Gluck lives with his greedy older brothers in the Treasure Valley, which is sheltered from storms and drought so the harvests are bountiful, making the brothers wealthy, although Gluck lives poorly due to his siblings' jealousy. One day a strange gentleman appears at the door and life changes as rain and drought destroy the fields.

The lesson that comes through very strongly in this tale is DON'T FOOL WITH MOTHER NATURE. Ignoring environmental warnings will bring catastrophe and poverty which can only be undone via acts of unselfishness. The characters are wonderful, especially the SouthWest Wind...Esquire (as stated on his business card).

*"...the water which has been refused to the cry of the weary and dying is unholy, though it had been blessed by every saint in heaven; and the water which is found in the vessel of mercy is holy, though it had been defiled by corpses."*

The artwork is meticulous, the type of illustration not often seen these days. Precisely curled moustaches and elaborately carved beer steins are lifelike, muted colours and black and white details. Lovely.

*There is no wealth but life.*

Book Season = Winter (full of wonder)

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## Oziel Bispo says

Três Irmãos vivem e são donos de um Vale fértil com muitas riquezas onde nunca a fome ou a miséria conseguiu entrar, mesmo que as localidades circunvizinhas estivessem passando por apuros, ali sempre abundava a prosperidade. Mas 2 irmãos são maus e um bom , quem prosperará ?

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## Stephen says

Of the dozen or more editions on goodreads, I chose this very old one to review, thinking it is most likely to have the illustrations I remember from the version my father read me in the 1950s. That book had belonged to him when he was a child. They are black and white line drawings, I don't think by Rackham. They gave a feeling more like Dore. The text of all editions will be the same; there is no need to search high and low for a certain illustrator.

A moralistic yet engaging fairy tale about charity, very Victorian, very lush language. People who like George Macdonald's work (say *At the Back of the North Wind*) should like this, though it is not so fantastical. Both books personify the wind, Macdonald making the North Wind feminine and Ruskin making Southwest Wind, Esq. a blustery little old man who packs a wallop.

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## Miriam says

Ruskin is much better known for his art criticism and theories of aesthetics, so it is interesting to see him trying to be lighter. However, this Victorian children's book will probably be too wordy and didactic for most contemporary kids.

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## Johanna says

"Charming" is the first word that comes to mind after reading this slim volume by Ruskin. The 1916 edition I picked up has lovely pen and ink drawings based on the originals. I'm amazed at the detail captured in just a few strokes of ink—the drawings and the words. The story is simple and delightful. Little Gluck's genuine concern for his rascally older brothers has a touch of naiveté, which is simultaneously heart-rending and heart-warming. The characters were surprisingly vivid for such a little book. The story and vocabulary are excellent for teaching by delighting.

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