



# The Violet Fairy Book

*Andrew Lang (Editor) , Leonora Blanche Alleyne Lang*

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Roumania, Japan, Serbia, Lithuania, Africa, Portugal, and Russia are among the sources of these 35 stories that tell of a haunted forest, chests of gold coins, a magical dog, and a man who outwits a dragon. Perhaps the best English versions available of these classic stories. 74 illustrations.

## The Violet Fairy Book Details

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Author : Andrew Lang (Editor) , Leonora Blanche Alleyne Lang

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# From Reader Review The Violet Fairy Book for online ebook

## Sandy Carlson says

For quick reads, there's nothing which satisfies more than Andrew Lang's fairy-folk tale collections.

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## Jennifer says

True rating: 4.5 stars.

As usual with Lang's *Fairy Books*, this was a very enjoyable collection of fairy tales from around the world. Most here will be unfamiliar to a reader (as they come from Japan, Serbia, Africa, Lithuania, etc.), but the plots, characters, and themes are those of fairy tales everywhere. Each is interesting and entertaining, though my favorite might have been "The Girl Who Pretended to Be a Boy". Oh, and as anyone knows who has looked into one of these Dover reprints, H.J. Ford's original illustrations are plentiful and superb. Fairy tales the way they should be written and presented.

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## Tessa says

Weird & wonderful. The illustrations give me heart-eyes.

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## Nieva21 says

This was the first anthology by Andrew Lang I read, and after doing so I was hooked. I marvelled at how uniquely told all of the tales within this collection are, some are known and others much more obscure. I find this more of an adult fascination that arose in me for the need that was hardly taken care of in children's fantasy literature, which Lang takes care of. I realize that some of the stories are much more gruesomely told even more so, than Grimm's depiction of other similar tales. I loved the artwork and I now wish to read through all of the collection of his anthology I now own, hunting for my favorite illustration and blow it up, and put it in my room. Somehow, I noticed it was quite easier for me to get drawn in and read the Violet Fairy Book without having to work at it, than it was for me to really get into the Red and I wonder if that had anything to do with when the works were written? Because I know Lang compiled the Red as his second collection, which came following the Blue, and within a span of time later on, did the Violet.

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## Lindsay says

I've never read so many fairy tales from so many cultures one after the other. While the stories on their own

are rich and engaging (the illustrations are marvelous, as well), it's being able to read 35 stories together and learn about the similarities and differences among different countries' story-telling styles that I found the most interesting part of this book. Things I learned:

- \* the number three (and multiples of), as well as the number seven, are heavily recurring themes
- \* the youngest brother/sister is always the most intelligent/clever/resourceful
- \* animals as guides/saviors/dispensers of wisdom is another universal theme, particularly if they're saved/rescued first
- \* if the boy does exactly what he's told, he always gets the girl
- \* things are rarely as they seem
- \* magic is everywhere

This was definitely worth the read, and I will happily place it on my fantasy shelf with my other favorites.

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## **Erik says**

I haven't read all of the stories, but this book is quite good. I love the diverse sources and the pretty illustrations. I especially liked the Romanian, Serbian, and Japanese stories. (Another bonus is that the cover is my favorite color!)

My favorite stories:

- The Nine Peahens and the Golden Apples (my favorite story in the collection!)
- The Fairy of the Dawn (this one is beautifully written - and long!)
- The History of Dwarf Long Nose
- The Nunda, Eater of People
- The Maiden with the Wooden Helmet
- The Monkey and the Jellyfish
- The Boys with the Golden Stars
- The Princess Who Was Hidden Underground

A few of them weren't that great. I was kind of weirded out by Virgilius the Sorcerer and Mogarzea and his Son, the two final stories in the book. The Girl Who Pretended to be a Boy genuinely confused me, as I couldn't understand what the moral was - is the story supposed to be a feminist story or a misogynistic one? I couldn't tell.

Otherwise, the book was great.

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## **Stephanie says**

My first recommendation is not to read this via a Kindle. The stories themselves weren't stellar, though like any collection there are a few you'll really enjoy and some you really won't. I think I'd have been able to rate this higher in physical book form with illustrations, and I suspect that added dimension would heighten the enjoyment of the fairy tales much more. However, I read the Kindle version, and I found it to be 'just ok' as a whole.

Some I enjoyed:

Stan Bolovan

Jesper Who Herded The Hares

The Girl Who Pretended To Be A Boy  
The History Of Dwarf Longnose  
The Frog  
Virgilius The Sorcerer

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## **Flower Ali says**

interesting stories from different cultures around the world

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## **Elizabeth says**

This is a wonderful collection of fairy and folk tales from around the world. Professor Lurie is quite a story teller in the flesh. I was privileged and had a blast when I took one of her courses in at Cornell - "An Analysis of Children's Literature." She was spell binding during class discussions and even more so when she read folk and fairy tales out loud. I still remember her course as if it were yesterday.

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## **Erin ? \*Proud Book Hoarder\* says**

Didn't recognize any of these. I especially liked the narrator doing the voices for 'The Grateful Prince'.

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## **Susan Molloy says**

The thirty-five stories in this book are taken from Romanian, Japanese, Serbian, Lithuanian, African, Portuguese, and Russian fairy story traditions. Included are "The Nine Pea-hens and the Golden Apples," "The Frog," "The Story of Halfman," and "The Boys with the Golden Stars," among others.

I found this collection to be boring and weird, but not in the fairy tale way. Too many of them ended strangely where they didn't make sense to the story, and many of the ending left me flat.

"The Violet Fairy Book," published in 1901, is the seventh of twelve collected fairy story books that were researched, translated and compiled by Andrew Lang (1844-1912) and his wife, Leonora Blanche Alleyne Lang. Andrew Lang, a Scotsman, was a literary critic, novelist, poet, and a contributor to the field of anthropology.

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## **Alun Williams says**

This is possibly my favourite from the Andrew Lang Fairy Books. At least it contains two of my favourite stories: "The Girl who Pretended to be a Boy" and "The History of Dwarf Long Nose". It is very surprising that the first of these should have made it into a book for children at all back in 1910 or so, but you'll have to

read the story to find out why. Many of the stories feature female heroines who are as capable of battling dragons and other monsters as any handsome prince.

Many of the stories are Rumanian, but there are also stories from other parts of Eastern Europe, and Africa and Japan amongst many other places. Few of the stories are likely to be familiar to you, though of course many of the incidents in the stories will be. This book shows that "multiculturalism" is not really such a recent invention - and it is great fun to have stories from very different parts of the world adjacent to one another.

The Amazon "Look Inside" feature is showing another edition of the book, not the Dover edition, which is much better than the one shown, since it contains all the original illustrations, which are a very important part of all the books. All the Fairy books are long out of copyright, and versions of them can be found on the web. But it is well worth buying the Dover Edition, so that you can linger over the illustrations as you read the tales.

There are twelve books in the series, and once you have one you will want to collect them all.

Amazon is showing "reading ages" for these books, but you should take them with a pinch of salt. None of the books, at least as printed by Dover, are suitable for many readers under about 9 or 10.

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## **Michiyo 'jia' Fujiwara says**

Once upon a time an old man and his wife lived together in a little village. They might have been happy if only the old woman had had the sense to hold her tongue at proper times. But anything which might happen indoors, or any bit of news which her husband might bring in when he had been anywhere, had to be told at once to the whole village, and these tales were repeated and altered till it often happened that much mischief was made, and the old man's back paid for it.

'Wife!'

'You can't think what a piece of good luck has come our way.'

'What, what, dear husband? Do tell me all about it at once.'

'No, no, you'll just go off and tell everyone.'

'No, indeed! How can you think such things! For shame! If you like I will swear never to——'

'Oh, well! if you are really in earnest then, listen.'

And he whispered in her ear: 'I've found a pot full of gold and silver in the forest! Hush!——'

'And why didn't you bring it back?'

'Because we'll drive there together and bring it carefully back between us.'

So the man and his wife drove to the forest.

HOW A FISH SWAM IN THE AIR AND A HARE IN THE WATER.

**Nila..** 1901

03/29/13

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## **Jannah (Cloud Child) says**

[2.5]

This is a collection of short fairytale/fable/mythical tales set in apparently different places of apparently different types of characters.

[edit: I just read the Foreword which I didn't before and it mentions influences of places such as Slavic, Japanese and Portugal

Aaand I just read the Preface which mentions the author is simply the collector of the stories not then writer. I still stand by my opinions of the book overall]

There was a few stories of the bunch that did hold my interest and I still remember:

+ A Tale of Tontawald (I would have loved to hear a more sinister and explored version of this..it reminded me a little of elements from Uprooted by Naomi Novik)

+ The Lute Player (I enjoyed this but it also frustrated me. Mainly enjoyed it bc for once a girl goes out on an adventure to do the saving but the other elements kinda pissed me off)

+ Stan Bolovlan (well I thought it was funny that the dragon was so easily tricked.. And that an old lady was his mother)

+ The Two Frogs (bc it was an absurd and short short story)

+ Dwarf Long Nose

Pros:

+ It began quite nicely

+ There were some original and new elements to the fairytale tropes

+ The stories were quick, easy to digest

+ The book illustrations were quite charming

Cons:

+ There were quite a few stories which followed along the same plotlines which meant I could skim past and know EXACTLY WHAT FUCKING HAPPENED IM SO PSYCHIC WHOO --

+ Trope heavy, follows along the same rules of most old school fairytale sensibilities but not in a positive way

+ There was no context or coherence to the sequence of events which happened in many stories. It was too

simply written, yet tried to over complicate with nonsensical logic.

+ No actual characters. Like no personality. Just labeled puppeteering. Oh and also not actual recognisable difference to the "different" settings of stories, except for the slapped on name tags given. Possibly because the surroundings weren't properly described in some stories.

+ LACK OF LOGIC TO THE ACTIONS OF THE CHARACTERS. Fine be misogynistic to fit into the time these stories were the norm etc.. Follow the tropes. But PLEASE. Give some credit to the puppets. We're nae that stupid ye ken.

+ While the illustrations were charming the stories matching them made me skim fast past them so I couldn't really appreciate them

+ Those more original ideas fell into the trope and soul sucking crap story trap and were never given a good airing.

+ I take it back I was never fine with the misogyny. I don't care what time period it was set in. WE ARE NOT OBJECTS TO BE MARRIED OFF AND WON AS PRIZES.

I think my outrage is probably a bit over the top. I just really was looking forward to some consistency and good weird.

This was bang you head on the wall weird slash boring.

So I went back and added an edit at the beginning bc I finally read the foreword n preface n I can see that these are old fashioned stories which have some sort of history of passing down. But I feel that though they revised the story to appeal to a more current (well if you can call 1972 current) audience it just still was stale and old.

The thing is.. I am gonna keep this book. Because some of the shit is entertainingly bad.

Would I recommend it? Yes for a pretty shelf bookend. Otherwise do whatever the hell you like with it.

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### **Mary Catelli says**

This one, I think, has more weak tales than the earlier ones, especially since many of them are other kinds of folk tales. Some are very good; I particularly mention "The Nine Pea-hens and the Golden Apples," "Jesper who Herded Hares," and "The Frog."

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### **April Lyn says**

Somewhere around 1 1/2 stars for me. At first I was really enjoying these stories because I'd read them as a teenager and it was a bit of fun nostalgia, but after a while the bad writing started getting to me. It's probably just poorly translated, since the stories are from various languages, but still - get an editor. The other thing that got old about halfway through was the stories "plots" which became very repetitive and predictable. I guess we know why it's free on kindle.

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### **Simona Friuli says**

Una raccolta di fiabe inusuali, estremamente suggestive e ricche di fascino, assemblata con attenzione ed esposta con uno stile fluido, appassionato e accessibile che rende indispensabile la lettura. Il volume è



ulteriormente impreziosito dalle magnifiche illustrazioni di Henry Justice Ford. Un gioiellino.

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## Kaion says

In the preface of **The Violet Fairy Book**, Andrew Lang's seventh in the series, he seems quite annoyed at certain "ladies" who persist in the belief that he is the author, rather than editor of the stories. Before you get too excited that means he will for once provide thorough credit for his sources, he continues:

*These stories are as old as anything that men have invented. They are narrated by naked savage women to naked savage children. They have been inherited by our earliest civilised ancestors, who really believed that beasts and trees and stones can talk if they choose, and behave kindly or unkindly. [...] As people grew more civilised and had kings and queens, princes and princesses, these exalted persons generally were chosen as heroes and heroines. But originally the characters were just 'a man,' and 'a woman,' and 'a boy,' and 'a girl,' with crowds of beasts, birds, and fishes, all behaving like human beings. When the nobles and other people became rich and educated, they forgot the old stories, but the country people did not, and handed them down, with changes at pleasure, from generation to generation. Then learned men collected and printed the country people's stories, and these we have translated, to amuse children. Their tastes remain like the tastes of their naked ancestors, thousands of years ago, and they seem to like fairy tales better than history, poetry, geography, or arithmetic, just as grown-up people like novels better than anything else.*

Sigh. I don't have time to unpack the whole "savages" thing or the rampant cultural imperialism/class hierarchy in the image of "learned men" swooping down to collect these found tales. I will however, will point out that this simplified image is almost certainly disingenuous.

For one, the *Fairy Books* frequently contain adaptations of tales of a very well known literary origin (see those from Marie d'Aulnoy or Hans Christian Andersen). Even those stories from the Grimm's, which they themselves considered true German "folk" tales may have a complicated authorship than suggested by this description.

I recently read an article titled "**On the Origin of Hansel and Gretel**" [Willem Blecourt, *Fabula* (2008)], which examines the origins of a number of similar Magic Flight stories (AT 313) in the early Grimm brothers' collections that were provided by young, single female acquaintances of the brothers who they met in small gatherings at their house. The article concludes that rather than being passive reciters of these "found" stories, the Wild and Hassenpflug sisters composed these tales from literary sources and their own imagination.

Ultimately these stories arose from an atmosphere of collaboration and rivalry between a small group of educated, and perhaps more importantly: eligible youths. ("Hansel and Gretel" in particular can be credited to Marie Hassenpflug and Dortchen Wild. Dortchen married Wilhelm in 1825. The only Grimm sister, Lotte, married a Hassenpflug brother in 1822.) The image of literary salon as middle-class courtship ritual is decidedly more Jane Austen than Joseph Conrad, to say the least.

What does this mean for Lang's "learned men"? Well for one, some of them were women. Not long-ago, far-off women, but female contemporaries whose contributions were unreported or minimized as that of mere facilitators. For instance, one Leonora Blanche Lang, who is credited only offhandedly in this volume ("Mrs. Lang") as the translator of a full two-thirds of the stories. In fact, it was not until the twelfth and final Lilac

Fairy Book that he says --

*The fairy books have been almost wholly the work of Mrs. Lang, who has translated and adapted them from the French, German, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, and other languages.*

*My part has been that of Adam, according to Mark Twain, in the Garden of Eden. Eve worked, Adam superintended. I also superintend. I find out where the stories are, and advise, and, in short, superintend."*

-- before launching into a less wrong-headed version of the "stories are ancient!" line. (Little consolation: "Mrs. Lang" still does not appear anywhere on the title page, and one has a devil of a time trying to track down who exactly the "Miss Blackley" who translates three of the *Violet* tales is supposed to be.)

It also means that we have to consider the political, social, and cultural contexts of Lang's "learned" men and women. That while the motifs and themes may be universal, their method of presentation are reflective of certain motives (conscious or unconscious) of their presenters, both at the stages of writing and editing.

As such, Lang's authorial erasure, and continued insistence then that these stories are suitable only for children may be an attempted neutralization of their social aims. A not small number of the stories in this volume come from contributors of the Romantic nationalist vein, including Vuk Karadzic ("major reformer of the Serbian language") and Friedrich Kreutzwald ("father of national literature of his country")\*. "Folk culture", as presented by these 19th century writers, served as a validation of native culture and national character. What is more political than laying a claim of continuity of imagination of a people?

Or perhaps, Lang's pose is a kind of subterfuge. Lang's commodification of folk culture for children was following no less than the lead of the Grimm's, who started out with scholarly ambition before realizing the greater commercial (and cultural) possibilities of creating volumes for children. Which is its own form of brilliance: The indoctrination must begin early and often. And all the more easy to deliver under the appearance of authorless, unsophisticated, "naked", innocuous entertainments.

Nah, us "civilised" people would never fall for those kind of "savage" methods, would we?

\*More on major contributors I could find information on:

- Besides his linguistic work, Vuk Karadzic is also considered the "father of the study of Serbian folklore" for his work collecting Serbian songs, riddles and fairy tales (four of which appear in this volume).

Naturally, the majority of his folkloric work was banned under the rule of Prince Milos of Serbia (which at the time was a principality of the Ottoman Empire), who felt "the content of some of the works, although purely poetic in nature, was capable of creating a certain sense of patriotism and a desire for freedom and independence, which very likely might have driven the populace to take up arms against the Turks."

- Friedrich Kreutzwald, who provides six Estonian tales, was a leader in the Estonian national awakening (movement towards Estonian self-rule, rather than Russian rule). Considered the author of the first original Estonian book, he also composed the national epic *Kalevipoeg* based on old Estonian legends of a giant who battled other giants and enemies of the land.

- German-born Mite Kremnitz, the source of three Romanian tales, was a close literary collaborator of and maid-of-honor to "Carmen Sylva" AKA Elisabeth of Wied, queen consort of Romania. Kremnitz's husband became a doctor of the royal Romanian family during the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), the very war that

precipitated independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878 and the declaration of Carol I as the first king of independent Romania in 1881. Mite Kremnitz's *Romanian Tales* was published in 1882. Kremnitz also wrote biographies of both monarchs. ("Carmen Sylva" is fascinating literary figure in her own right, but that's a story for another day.)

- Edward Steere, who features three Swahili tales, was an English-born "colonial bishop [who worked] to abolish slavery in Zanzibar."

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On to the actual stories, the focus of *The Violet Fairy Book* appears to be on the Eastern European, with the Estonian, Serbian, and Romanian making heavy showings, as well as a handful of Swahili and Japanese tales. If there are only a handful of truly memorable tales, there are plenty of interesting ones. And as I read more of these *Fairy Books*, certain repeated motifs do seem to stand out to me all the more. **Rating: 3 stars**

- On quests: No less than three stories in the *Violet* are centered around the youngest son accomplishing the father-king's quest after his elder brothers have failed. In particular, the Serbian The Nine Peahens and the Golden Apples (Vuk Karadzic) and the Swahili The Nunda (Steere) begin with the same episode of the king asking the sons to discover what bird is eating the fruit of his tree. From there, *Peahens* becomes a Swan-Maiden search for the lost bride [AT 400], while *Nunda* briefly becomes a "Firebird" quest [AT 550] turned monster hunt.

**The Fairy of the Dawn** (Romanian - Mite Kremnitz) is the third story of this triumvirate, with the son seeking the water from the spring of the fairy of the dawn to heal his father, who cries out of one eye and laughs out of the other.

This turns out to be the longest story in the collection, spanning an epic quest that has elements of both the aforementioned "Firebird" [AT550] and "Water of Life" [AT 551] quests, but takes on its own distinctly pagan images. Which include travels through the realms of the goddesses of Mercury/Wednesday, Jupiter/Thursday, and Venus/Friday, and before he arrives at the palace of the fairy of the dawn, where he eats the bread of strength and the wine of youth and steals three kisses before obtaining the water of her well as she sleeps.

"The Fairy of the Dawn" abounds in vivid imagery, though I particularly like the episode of the Welwa. A goblin of wind and air who is first described as having "not exactly a head" with the mane of a horse, horns of a deer, face of a bear, eyes of a polecat, and the body of "something of each" -- and then:

... something came to him--WHAT I cannot tell you. Perhaps, in his dreams, a man may see a creature which has what it has not got, and has not got what it has. At least, that was what the Welwa seemed like to Petru. She flew with her feet, and walked with her wings; her head was in her back, and her tail was on top of her body; her eyes were in her neck, and her neck in her forehead, and how to describe her further I do not know.

Shivers.

- On transformation chases: I've always been fond of the part of Cinderella variant "Tam and Cam" in which the heroine comes back again and again as a supernatural helper after each time she is killed by her stepsister. Two filial versions appear here. In The Boy With the Golden Stars (Romanian, Kremnitz), the king's sons become trees, beds, and fishes before they can return to reclaim their mother's rightful place. (The king is sort of a douche though, burying his wife alive or whatever.)

It's more touchingly applied in "The Envious Neighbor" (Japanese, Karl Alberti), better known as **Hanasaka Jiisan**, in which a dog returns as a tree, a mortar, and cherry blossoms in order to bless the old couple who took in the dog in. Surprisingly, the dog does not return itself. The ending is not a restoration, only a reminder. The beauty of the cherry blossom is in the ephemerality of the thing; so too, the impermanence of filial duty that touches the sentimental nerve

The Prince Who Wanted to See the World (Portuguese) and **The Grateful Prince** (Estonian, Kreutzwald) features the more tradition style of transformation chase. Specifically both are tales of Aarne-Thompson type 313, in which the heroine helps the hero's escape, first to perform the three tasks before they flee together by means of a magic flight. This is a story type at least as old as Jason and Medea, and the basic, yet highly flexible formula of three tasks + three transformations (+ optional "hero forgets the heroine" episode) explains its enduring popularity.

"The Grateful Prince" is really very charming variant of the tale, which works because of the depth of characterization. For once, the hero is good-humored enough that we actually buy that the heroine would want to help him at all. Unlike their progenitors, the hero and heroine actually seem well-matched, and Kreutzwald provides an interesting twist by foregrounding the psycho-social subtext. The farm under the ground is essentially an uncanny reflection of the upper world, and so the impossible tasks set before the hero are only harder versions of normal farm chores (feeding a horse, milking a cow, stacking the hay).

- On genderbenders: **The Lute Player** (Russian) is a sweet fable of a king who is bored and starts a war with a heathen prince and gets captured for the trouble, and his awesome wife, who disguises herself a boy and sings so sweetly that the heathen prince promises to give her anything she desires. Make music not war. Naturally, the king does not appreciate her for it. (I would have stuck with the heathen prince.)

But if I only have eyes for one, it's **The Girl Who Pretended To Be A Boy** (Romanian, Jules Brun/Leo Bachelin), which is one of the most delightful fairy tales I've read in the last few years. It's a story of guises and appearances. The father guised as wolf (permissive enough to let his daughters try, but protective enough to test them first), the daughter guised as son. The deceptiveness of beauty and the usefulness of old things. And of course, the mutability of gender. Note that Fet-Fruners is equally skilled at sword rights and cooking, is fond of both flowers and practical weapons -- and only plays upon a fake hyper-masculinity in order to take advantage of other's rigid gender expectations. Golden-haired Iliana does the same with a pretended hyper-femininity, playing the part of the fickle and empty-headed damsel, and effectively saving her own damned self from two unwanted marriages.

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## Jennifer Girard says

Some were enjoyable most were repetitive.

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## Angela says

It's interesting to see how stories were told back in the day, but many are similar and the action leaves your desired unfulfilled.

