

Bluebeard

Charles Perrault

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There was once upon a time a man who had several fine houses both in town and country, a good deal of silver and gold plate, embroidered furniture, and coaches gilt all over with gold. But this same man had the misfortune to have a Blue Beard, which made him so frightfully ugly that all the women and girls ran away from him.

One of his neighbours, a lady of quality, had two daughters who were perfect beauties. He desired of her one of them in marriage, leaving to her the choice of which of them she would bestow upon him. They would neither of them have him, and sent him backwards and forwards from one another, being resolved never to marry a man that had a Blue Beard. That which moreover gave them the greater disgust and aversion, was that he had already been married to several wives, and no body ever knew what were become of them.

Blue Beard, to engage their affection, took them with my lady their mother, and three or four other ladies of their acquaintance, and some young people of the neighborhood, to one of his country seats, where they stayed full eight days. There was nothing now to be seen but parties of pleasure, hunting of all kinds, fishing, dancing, feasts and collations. No body went to bed, they passed the night in rallying and playing upon one another: In short, every thing so well succeeded, that the youngest daughter began to think, that the master of the house had not a Beard so very Blue, and that he was a very civil gentleman.

As soon as they returned home the marriage was concluded. About a month afterwards Blue Beard told his wife, that he was obliged to take a journey into a distant country for six weeks at least, about an affair of very great consequence, desiring her to divert herself in his absence, to send for her friends and acquaintance, and carry them into the country, if she pleased, and make good cheer wherever she was: "Here," said he, "are the keys of the two great rooms that hold my best and richest furniture; these are of my silver and gold plate, which is not to be made use of every day; these open my strong boxes, which hold my gold and silver money; these my caskets of jewels; and this is the master-key that opens all my apartments. But for this little one here, it is the key of the closet at the end of the great gallery on the ground floor. Open them all, go into all and every one except that little closet, which I forbid you, and forbid you in such a manner, that if you happen to open it, there is nothing but what you may expect from my just anger and resentment." She promised to observe everything he ordered her, who, after having embraced her, got into his coach and proceeded on his journey.

Her neighbors and good friends did not stay to be sent for by the new married lady, so great was their impatience to see all the rich furniture of her house, not daring to come while the husband was there, because of his Blue Beard which frightened them. They ran through all the rooms, closets, wardrobes, which were all so rich and fine that they seemed to surpass one another. After that, they went up into the two great rooms where were the best and richest furniture; they could not sufficiently admire the number and beauty of the tapestry, beds, couches, cabinets, stands, tables and looking-glasses, in which you might see yourself from head to foot; some of them were framed with glass, others with silver and silver gilt, the finest and most magnificent as ever were seen. They never ceased to extol and envy the happiness of their friend, who in the mean time no ways diverted herself in looking upon all these rich things, because of the impatience she had to go and open the closet of the ground floor. She was so much pressed by her curiosity, that without considering that it was very uncivil to leave her company, she went down a back pair of stairs, and with such an excessive haste, that she had like to have broken her neck two or three times.

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Being come to the closet door, she stopped for some time, thinking upon her husband's orders, and considering what unhappiness might attend her were she disobedient; but the temptation was so strong she could not overcome it. She took then the little key and opened it in a very great trembling. But she could see nothing distinctly, because the windows were shut; after some moments she began to observe that the door was all covered over with clotted blood, on which lay the bodies of several dead women ranged against the walls. (These were all the wives that Blue Beard had married and murdered one after another.) She thought that she should have died for fear, and the key that she pulled out of the lock fell out of her hand. After having somewhat recovered her surprise, she took up the key, locked the door and went upstairs into her chamber to recover herself, but she could not, so much was she frightened. Having observed that the key of the closet was stained with blood, she tried two or three times to wipe it off, but the blood would not come out; in vain did she wash it and even rub it with soap and sand, the blood still remained, for the key was a Fairy, and she could never quite make it clean; when the blood was gone off from one side. it came again on the other.

Blue Beard returned from his journey the same evening, and said he had received letters upon the road, informing him that the affair he went about was finished to his advantage. His wife did all she could to convince him she was extremely glad of his speedy return. The next morning he asked for the keys, which she returned, but with such a trembling hand, that he easily guessed what had happend. "What is the matter," said he, "that the key of the closet is not amongst the rest?" "I must certainly." said she, "have left it above upon the table." "Do not fail," said Blue Beard, "of giving it to me presently." After several goings backwards and forwards she was forced to bring him the key. Blue Beard having very attentively considered it, said to his Wife, "How comes this blood upon the key?" "I don't know," said the poor Woman paler than death.

"You don't know," replied Blue Beard, "I know very well, you were resolved to go into the closet, were you not? Very well, Madam, you shall go in, and take your place amongst the ladies you saw there."

Upon this she threw herself at her husband's feet, and begged his pardon with all the signs of a true repentance, and that she would never more be disobedient. She would have melted a rock, so beautiful and sorrowful was she; but Blue Beard had a heart harder than the hardest rock!

"You must die, Madam," said he, "and that presently." "Since I must die," said she, looking upon him with her eyes all bathed in tears, "give me some little time to say my prayers." "I give you,"

said Blue Beard, "a quarter of an hour, but not one moment more."

When she was alone, she called out to her sister, and said to her, "Sister Anne," for that was her name, "go up, I desire thee, upon the top of the tower, and see if my brothers are not coming.

They promised me that they would come today, and if thou seest them, give them a sign to make haste."

Her sister Anne went up upon the top of the tower, and the poor afflicted lady cried out from time to time, "Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see nothing coming?" And sister Anne said, "I see nothing but the sun that makes a dust, and the grass that grows green." In the meanwhile Blue Beard, holding a great cutlass in his hand, cried out as loud as he could to his wife, "Come down presently, or I'll come up to you." "One moment longer, if you please." said his wife, and immediately she cried out very softly, "Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see nothing coming?" "I see," replied sister Anne, "a great dust that comes on this side here." "Are they my brothers?"

"Alas! no, my dear sister. I see a flock of sheep." "Will you not come down?" cried Blue Beard.

"One moment longer," said his wife, and then she cried out, "Anne, sister Anne, dost thou see nothing coming?" "I see," said she, "two horsemen coming, but they are yet a great way off. God be praised," said she immediately after, "they are my brothers. I have made them a sign as well as I can to make haste." Blue Beard cried out now so

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loud, that he made the whole house tremble.

The poor lady came down and threw herself at his feet all in tears with her hair about her shoulders. "This signifies nothing," says Blue Beard. "You must die." Then taking hold of her hair with one hand, and holding up the cutlass with the other, he was going to cut off her head.

The poor lady turning about to him, and looking at him with dying eyes, desired him to afford her one little moment to recollect herself. "No, no," said he, "recommend thyself to God." For at this instant there was such a loud knocking at the gate, that Blue Beard stopped short of a sudden. They opened the gate, and immediately entered two horsemen, who drawing their swords, ran directly to Blue Beard. He knew them to be his wife's brothers, one a dragoon, the other a musketeer, so that he ran away immediately to save himself, but the two brothers pursued him so close, that they overtook him before he could get to the steps of the porch. when they ran their swords through his body and left him dead.

The poor lady was almost as dead as her husband, and had not strength enough to rise and embrace her brothers. Blue Beard had no heirs, and so his wife became mistress of all his estate.

She made use of one part of it to marry her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had loved her a long while, another part to buy captains' commissions for her brothers, and the rest to marry herself to a very honest gentleman who made her forget the ill time she had passed with Blue Beard.