

BLUE BEARD

BY CHARLES PERRAULT

There was, some time ago, a gentleman who was very rich. He had fine town and country houses, his dishes and plates were all of gold or silver, his rooms were hung with damask, his chairs and sofas were covered with the richest silks, and his carriages were all gilt with gold in a grand style. But it happened that this gentleman had a blue beard, which made him so very frightful and ugly, that none of the ladies, in the parts where he lived, would venture to go into his company. Now there was a certain lady of rank, who lived very near him, and had two daughters, both of them of very great beauty. Blue Beard asked her to bestow one of them upon him for a wife, and left it to herself to choose which of the two it should be. But both the young ladies again and again said they would never marry Blue Beard; yet, to be as civil as they could, each of them said, the only reason why she would not have him was, because she was loath to hinder her sister from the match, which would be such a good one for her. Still the truth of the matter was, they could neither of them bear the thoughts of having a husband with a blue beard; and besides, they had heard of his having been married to several wives before, and nobody could tell what



had ever become of any of them. As Blue Beard wished very much to gain their favour, he asked the lady and her daughters, and some ladies who were on a visit at their house, to go with him to one of his country seats, where they spent a whole week, during which they passed all their time in nothing but parties for hunting and fishing, music, dancing, and feasts. No one even thought of going to bed, and the nights were passed in merry-makings of all kinds. In short, the time rolled on in so much pleasure, that the youngest of the two sisters began to think that the beard which she had been so much afraid of, was not so very blue, and that the gentleman who owned it was vastly civil and pleasing. Soon after their return home, she told her mother that she had no longer any dislike to accept of Blue Beard for her husband; and in a very short time they were married.

About a month after the marriage had taken place, Blue Beard told his wife that he should be forced to leave her for a few weeks, as he had some affairs to attend to in the country. He desired her to be sure to indulge herself in every kind of pleasure, to invite as many of her friends as she liked, and to treat them with all sorts of

dainties, that her time might pass pleasantly till he came back again. "Here," said he, "are the keys of the two large wardrobes. This is the key of the great box that contains the best plate, which we use for company, this belongs to my strong box, where I keep my money, and this belongs to the casket, in which are all my jewels. Here also is a master-key to all the rooms in the house; but this small key belongs to the closet at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor. I give you leave," said he, "to open, or to do what you like with all the rest except this closet. This, my dear, you must not enter, nor even put the key into the lock, for all the world. If you do not obey me in this one thing, you must expect the most dreadful punishments." She promised to obey his orders in the most faithful manner; and Blue Beard, after kissing her tenderly, stepped into his coach, and drove away.

When Blue Beard was gone, the friends of his wife did not wait to be asked, so eager were they to see all the riches and fine things she had gained by marriage; for they had none of them gone to the wedding, on account of their dislike to the blue beard of the bridegroom. As soon as ever they came to the house, they ran about from room to room, from closet to closet, and then from wardrobe to wardrobe, looking into each with wonder and delight, and said, that every fresh one they came to, was richer and finer than what they had seen the moment before. At last they came to the drawing-rooms, where their surprise was made still greater by the costly grandeur of the

hangings, the sofas, the chairs, carpets, tables, sideboards, and looking-glasses; the frames of these last were silver-gilt, most richly adorned, and in the glasses they saw themselves from head to foot. In short, nothing could exceed the richness of what they saw; and they all did not fail to admire and envy the good fortune of their friend. But all this time the bride herself was far from thinking about the fine speeches they made to her, for she was eager to see what was in the closet her husband had told her not to open. So great, indeed, was her desire to do this, that, without once thinking how rude it would be to leave her guests, she slipped away down a private staircase that led to this forbidden closet, and in such a hurry, that she was two or three times in danger of falling down stairs and breaking her neck.

When she reached the door of the closet, she stopped for a few moments to think of the order her husband had given her, and how he had told her that he would not fail to keep his word and punish her very severely, if she did not obey him. But she was so very curious to know what was inside, that she made up her mind to venture in spite of every thing. She then, with a trembling hand, put the key into the lock, and the door straight flew open. As the window shutters were closed, she at first could see nothing; but in a short time she saw that the floor was covered with clotted blood, on which the bodies of several dead women were lying.

These were all the wives whom Blue Beard had married, and killed one after another. At

this sight she was ready to sink with fear, and the key of the closet door, which she held in her hand, fell on the floor. When she had a little got the better of her fright, she took it up, locked the door, and made haste back to her own room, that she might have a little time to get into a humour to amuse her company; but this she could not do, so great was her fright at what she had seen. As she found that the key of the closet had got stained with blood in falling on the floor, she wiped it two or three times over to clean it; yet still the blood kept on it the same as before. She next washed it, but the blood did not move at all. She then scoured it with brick dust, and after with sand, but in spite of all she could do, the blood was still there; for the key was a fairy who was Blue Beard's friend; so that as fast as she got off the blood on one side, it came again on the other. Early in the same evening Blue Beard came home, saying, that before he had gone far on his journey he was met by a horseman, who was coming to tell him that his affair in the country was settled without his being present; upon which his wife said every thing she could think of, to make him believe she was in a transport of joy at his sudden return.

The next morning he asked her for the keys: she gave them to him; but as she could not help showing her fright, Blue Beard easily guessed what had been the matter. "How is it," said he, "that the key of the closet upon the ground floor is not here?" "Is it not?" said the wife, "then I must have left it on my dress-

ing-table." "Be sure you give it me by and by," replied Blue Beard. After going a good many times backwards and forwards, as if she was looking for the key, she was at last forced to give it to Blue Beard. He looked hard at it, and then said: "How came this blood upon the key?" "I am sure I do not know," replied the poor lady, at the same time turning as white as a sheet. "You do not know?" said Blue Beard sternly, "but I know well enough. You have been in the closet on the ground floor! Very well, madam: since you are so mighty fond of this closet, you shall be sure to take your place among the ladies you saw there." His wife, who was almost dead with fear, now fell upon her knees, asked his pardon a thousand times for her fault, and begged him to forgive her, looking all the time so very mournful and lovely, that she would have melted any heart that was not harder than a rock. But Blue Beard only said, "No, no, madam; you shall die this very minute!" "Alas!" said the poor trembling creature, "if I must die, give me, as least, a little time to say my prayers." "I give you," replied the cruel Blue Beard, "half a quarter of an hour: not a moment longer." When Blue Beard had left her to herself, she called her sister; and after telling her, as well as she could for sobbing, that she had but half a quarter of an hour to live; "Prithee," said she, "sister Anne," (this was her sister's name), "run up to the top of the tower, and see if my brothers are not in sight, for they said they would visit me to-day, and if you see them, make a sign for

them to gallop on as fast as ever they can." Her sister straight did as she was desired; and the poor trembling lady every minute cried out to her: "Anne! sister Anne! do you see any one coming?" Her sister said, "I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass, which looks green."

In the meanwhile, Blue Beard, with a great cimenter in his hand, bawled as loud as he could to his wife, "Come down at once, or I will fetch you." "One moment longer, I beseech you," replied she, and again called softly to her sister, "Sister Anne, do you see any one coming?" To which she answered, "I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass, which looks green." Blue Beard now again bawled out, "Come down, I say, this very moment, or I shall come to fetch you." "I am coming; indeed I will come in one minute," sobbed his wretched wife. Then she once more cried out, "Anne! sister Anne! do you see any one coming?" "I see," said her sister, "a cloud of dust a little to the left." "Do you think it is my brothers?" said the wife. "Alas! no, dear sister," replied she, "it is only a flock of sheep." "Will you come down, madam?" said Blue Beard, in the greatest rage. "Only one single moment more," said she. And then she called out for the last time, "Sister Anne! sister Anne! do you see no one coming?" "I see," replied her sister, "two men on horseback coming; but they are still a great way off." "Thank God," cried she, "they are my brothers; beckon them to make haste." Blue Beard now cried out so loud for her to come

down, that his voice shook the whole house. The poor lady, with her hair loose, and all in tears, now came down, and fell on her knees, begging him to spare her life; but he stopped her, saying, "All this is of no use, for you shall die," and then, seizing her by the hair, raised his cimenter to strike off her head. The poor woman now begged a single moment to say one prayer. "No, no," said Blue Beard, "I will give you no more time. You have had too much already." And again he raised his arm. Just at this instant a loud knocking was heard at the gates, which made Blue Beard wait for a moment to see who it was. The gates now flew open, and two officers, dressed in their uniform, came in, and, with their swords in their hands, ran straight to Blue Beard, who, seeing they were his wife's brothers, tried to escape from their presence; but they pursued and seized him before he had gone twenty steps, and plunging their swords into his body he fell down dead at their feet.

The poor wife, who was almost as dead as her husband, was not able at first to rise and embrace her brothers; but she soon came to herself; and, as Blue Beard had no heirs, she found herself the owner of his great riches. She gave a part of his vast fortune as a marriage dowry to her sister Anne, who soon after became the wife of a young gentleman who had long loved her. Some of the money she laid out in buying captains' commissions for her two brothers, and the rest she gave to a worthy gentleman whom she married shortly after, and whose kind treatment soon made her forget Blue Beard's cruelty.