

**ШАРЛЬ
ПЕРРО**

THE STORY OF
BLUE-BEARD

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THE STORY OF BLUE BEARD

Once on a time there was a man who had fine town and country houses, gold and silver plate, embroidered furniture, and coaches gilt all over; but unfortunately, this man had a blue beard, which made him look so ugly and terrible, that there was not a woman or girl who did not run away from him. One of his neighbours, a lady of quality, had two daughters, who were perfectly beautiful. He proposed to marry one of them, leaving her to choose which of the two she would give him. Neither of them would have him; and they sent him from one to the other, not being able to make up their minds to marry a man who had a blue beard. What increased their distaste to him was, that he had had several wives already, and nobody knew what had become of them.

Blue Beard, in order to cultivate their acquaintance, took them, with their mother, three or four of their most intimate friends, and some young persons who resided in the neighbourhood, to one of his country seats, where they passed an entire week. Nothing was thought of but excursions, hunting and fishing, parties, balls, entertainments, collations; nobody went to

bed; the whole night was spent in merry games and gambols. In short, all went off so well, that the youngest daughter began to find out that the beard of the master of the house was not as blue as it used to be, and that he was a very worthy man. Immediately upon their return to town the marriage took place. At the end of a month Blue Beard told his wife that he was obliged to take a journey, which would occupy six weeks at least, on a matter of great consequence; that he entreated she would amuse herself as much as she could during his absence; that she would invite her best friends, take them into the country with her if she pleased, and keep an excellent table everywhere.

"Here," said he to her, "are the keys of my two great store-rooms; these are those of the chests in which the gold and silver plate is kept, that is only used on particular occasions; these are the keys of the strong boxes in which I keep my money; these open the caskets that contain my jewels; and this is the pass-key of all the apartments. As for this little key, it is that of the closet at the end of the long gallery, on the ground floor. Open everything, and go everywhere except into that little closet, which I forbid you to enter, and I forbid you so strictly, that if you should venture to open the door, there is nothing that you may not have to dread from my anger!" She promised to observe implicitly all his directions, and after he had embraced her, he got on to his horse and set out on his journey.

The neighbours and friends of the young bride did not wait for her invitation, so eager were they to see all the treasures

contained in the mansion, not having ventured to enter it while the husband was at home, so terrified were they at his blue beard.

Behold them immediately running through all the rooms, closets, and wardrobes, each apartment exceeding the other in beauty and richness.

They ascended afterwards to the store-rooms, where they could not sufficiently admire the number and elegance of the tapestries, the beds, the sofas, the cabinets, the stands,¹ the tables, and the mirrors in which they could see themselves from head to foot, and that had frames some of glass,² some of silver, and some of gilt metal, more beautiful and magnificent than had ever been seen. They never ceased enlarging upon and envying the good fortune of their friend, who in the meanwhile was not in the least entertained by the sight of all these treasures, in consequence of her impatience to open the closet on the ground floor. Her curiosity increased to such a degree that, without reflecting how rude it was to leave her company, she ran down a back staircase in such haste that twice or thrice she narrowly escaped breaking her neck. Arrived at the door of the closet, she paused for a moment, bethinking herself of her husband's prohibition, and that some misfortune might befall her for her disobedience; but

¹ Gueridons, *i. e.* stands to place lights or china upon. The word is now used to signify any small round table with one foot; but the old-fashioned stand, which was higher than a table, and its top not bigger than a dessert-plate, is occasionally to be met with.

² Looking-glasses with frames of the same material were much in vogue at that period. Of silver-framed mirrors some magnificent specimens remain to us at Knowle Park, Kent.

the temptation was so strong that she could not conquer it. She therefore took the little key and opened, tremblingly, the door of the closet. At first she could discern nothing, the windows being closed; after a short time she began to perceive that the floor was all covered with clotted blood, in which were reflected the dead bodies of several females suspended against the walls. These were all the wives of Blue Beard, who had cut their throats one after the other. She was ready to die with fright, and the key of the closet, which she had withdrawn from the lock, fell from her hand. After recovering her senses a little, she picked up the key, locked the door again, and went up to her chamber to compose herself; but she could not succeed, so greatly was she agitated. Having observed that the key of the closet was stained with blood, she wiped it two or three times, but the blood would not come off. In vain she washed it, and even scrubbed it with sand and freestone, the blood was still there, for the key was enchanted, and there were no means of cleaning it completely: when the blood was washed off one side, it came back on the other.

Blue Beard returned that very evening, and said that he had received letters on the road informing him that the business on which he was going had been settled to his advantage. His wife did all she could to persuade him that she was delighted at his speedy return. The next morning he asked her for his keys again; she gave them to him; but her hand trembled so, that he had not much difficulty in guessing what had occurred. "How comes it,"

said he, "that the key of the closet is not with the others?"

"I must have left it," she replied, "up-stairs on my table." "Fail not," said Blue Beard, "to give it me presently." After several excuses, she was compelled to produce the key. Blue Beard having examined it, said to his wife, "Why is there some blood on this key?" "I don't know," answered the poor wife, paler than death. "You don't know?" rejoined Blue Beard. "I know well enough. You must needs enter the closet. Well, madam, you shall enter it, and go take your place amongst the ladies you saw there." She flung herself at her husband's feet, weeping and begging his pardon, with all the signs of true repentance for having disobeyed him. Her beauty and affliction might have melted a rock, but Blue Beard had a heart harder than a rock. "You must die, madam," said he, "and immediately." "If I must die," she replied, looking at him with streaming eyes, "give me a little time to say my prayers." "I give you half a quarter of an hour," answered Blue Beard, "but not a minute more." As soon as he had left her, she called her sister, and said to her, "Sister Anne" (for so she was named), "go up, I pray thee, to the top of the tower, and see if my brothers are not coming. They have promised me that they would come to see me today; and if you see them, sign to them to make haste." Sister Anne mounted to the top of the tower, and the poor distressed creature called to her every now and then, "Anne! sister Anne! dost thou not see anything coming?" And sister Anne answered her, "I see nothing but the sun making dust, and the grass growing green."

In the meanwhile Blue Beard, with a great cutlass in his hand, called out with all his might to his wife, "Come down quickly, or I will come up there." "One minute more, if you please," replied his wife; and immediately repeated in a low voice, "Anne! sister Anne! dost thou not see anything coming?" And sister Anne replied, "I see nothing but the sun making dust, and the grass growing green." "Come down quickly," roared Blue Beard, "or I will come up there." "I come," answered his wife, and then exclaimed, "Anne! sister Anne! dost thou not see anything coming?" "I see," said sister Anne, "a great cloud of dust moving this way." "Is it my brothers?" "Alas! no, sister, I see a flock of sheep." "Wilt thou not come down?" shouted Blue Beard. "One minute more," replied his wife, and then she cried, "Anne! sister Anne! dost thou not see anything coming?" "I see," she replied, "two horsemen coming this way; but they are still at a great distance." "Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed, a moment afterwards.

"They are my brothers! I am making all the signs I can to hasten them." Blue Beard began to roar so loudly that the whole house shook again. The poor wife descended, and went and threw herself, with streaming eyes and dishevelled tresses, at his feet.

"It is of no use," said Blue Beard. "You must die!" Then seizing her by the hair with one hand, and raising his cutlass with the other, he was about to cut off her head. The poor wife turned towards him, and fixing upon him her dying eyes, implored him to allow her one short moment to collect herself.

"No, no," said he; "recommend thyself heartily to Heaven." And lifting his arm – At this moment there was so loud a knocking at the gate, that Blue Beard stopped short. It was opened, and two horsemen were immediately seen to enter, who, drawing their swords, ran straight at Blue Beard. He recognized them as the brothers of his wife – one a dragoon, the other a musqueteer, and, consequently, fled immediately, in hope to escape; but they pursued him so closely, that they overtook him before he could reach the step of his door, and, passing their swords through his body, left him dead on the spot. The poor wife was almost as dead as her husband, and had not strength to rise and embrace her brothers. It was found that Blue Beard had no heirs, and so his widow remained possessed of all his property. She employed part of it in marrying her sister Anne to a young gentleman who had long loved her; another part, in buying captains' commissions for her two brothers, and with the rest she married herself to a very worthy man, who made her forget the miserable time she had passed with Blue Beard.

Provided one has common sense,
And of the world but knows the ways,
This story bears the evidence
Of being one of bygone-days.
No husband now is so terrific,
Impossibilities expecting:
Though jealous, he is still pacific,
Indifference to his wife affecting.

And of his beard, whate'er the hue,
His spouse need fear no such disaster;
Indeed, 'twould often puzzle you
To say which of the twain is master.