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Title: The Wonderful Story of Blue Beard, and His Last Wife

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Release date: January 1, 2014 [EBook #44558]

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WONDERFUL STORY OF
BLUE BEARD, AND HIS LAST WIFE ***

BLUE

BEARD



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THE
Wonderful Story
OF
BLUE BEARD,
AND
HIS LAST WIFE.

With many illustrations
BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK.




NEW-YORK:
PUBLISHED BY HUESTIS & COZANS,
No. 104 Nassau, corner of Ann St.

STEREOTYPED BY VINCENT L. DILL.

THE WONDERFUL STORY OF BLUE BEARD.

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 ANY years ago, a noble castle stood on the side of a hill, surrounded by the most beautiful gardens, groves, and fields. It was the residence of a man amazingly rich; and who therefore had the rooms of his castle furnished with all the elegance that opulence could obtain.

Almost every one would suppose, that there could hardly be a happier man than the possessor of so much wealth, and such a stately dwelling: but it is not in the power of riches to give happiness; nor can splendor remove every cause of sorrow and discontent.

It was the misfortune of this gentleman to be somewhat disfigured, by the extraordinary circumstance of having a blue beard. His general complexion was fair; and the hair on his head was of a light brown colour. It is therefore no wonder that, with a blue beard, his appearance should be considered so remarkable as to be almost forbidding; indeed it was thought so strange, that he was known only by the name of Blue Beard.

One of the chief misfortunes which this deformity produced, was the unwillingness which every young lady felt, even to be in his company. It was in vain that his costly carriages and Arabian horses were continually admired; it was in vain that his wealth was constantly mentioned in conversation; none of the young ladies would speak to him, or meet him.

Perhaps one great cause of this aversion arose from a report that he had had several wives; but no one seemed to know what had become of any of them. They had disappeared, but no one knew how.

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Amongst the families that lived within a short distance of his castle, there was an elderly lady and her two daughters. Both these young ladies were highly accomplished, and much admired: but the younger of the two was also thought to be unusually handsome, and was therefore noticed rather more than her sister. It often happens, that beauty is a misfortune; because, if a young lady has not good sense, it will make her vain; and a vain girl generally falls into some kind of misery or trouble.

Blue Beard became acquainted with the mother of these young ladies; who having found that he was a gentleman of agreeable conversation and pleasing manners, told her daughters, she would not allow them to be so rude as to shun any person merely on account of a circumstance for which he ought not to be blamed nor despised. She told them that she did not desire them to like this gentleman either for his wealth or his behaviour; but that it was improper in them to show such weakness, as to avoid any one for such a peculiarity; she reminded them how liable we all are to changes of appearance, from beauty to ugliness, by diseases which we can neither prevent nor remove; and that if they shunned one man because he had a blue beard, they might also avoid others for having black hair, or grey eyes.

The young ladies were convinced of the propriety of what their mamma said; and though they were quite sure that they could never like Blue Beard, yet they resolved to remain in the room when he visited their mother, and to speak to him with proper civility.

After a few days he visited the house again, and had an opportunity of seeing and conversing with the young ladies; they treated him with politeness, and their fears (for they had been somewhat afraid of him) began to subside. He met them in the same manner two or three times afterwards; and at length prevailed on the old lady to come with her daughters to his castle, and there spend with him a few days.

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Mr. Blue Beard has bad dreams, and determines to get married again.

Vanity on their own account, and respect towards Blue Beard, induced them to make the greatest preparations for the intended visit. The young ladies thought of little but the magnificence of the dresses they should wear, and the taste which should be displayed in every part of their appearance.

Indeed, if both the young ladies had really been extremely fond of Blue Beard, they could not have taken greater pains to show themselves off, than they employed in preparing for their appearance at the castle. But, in truth, neither of them liked him. Such, however, is the thoughtless pride of some young ladies, that scarcely any thing pleases them so well as an opportunity of surpassing each other in displaying off their dress, jewels, or other finery.

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Blue Beard's servant announces his master's intention of coming a courting, to an interesting young lady.

The two young ladies having fully prepared themselves, they, accompanied by their mamma, on the day that had been appointed, set out for the castle, and at length reached the gate that lead through Blue Beard's grounds; and, although they had heard a great deal of the taste and expence which had been employed to improve and decorate the land around the castle, yet they were surprised by unexpected beauties. The finest trees overshadowed the walks, and shaded them from the heat of the sun; the most fragrant shrubs and flowers perfumed the air; fountains were playing in

every direction; and alcoves were found in every inviting spot. Having passed through these delightful grounds, they reached the castle itself; at the entrance of which they were received by Blue Beard, and a retinue of servants in the most costly dresses. The hall was large and very lofty; its roof was supported by pillars of the finest marble; the windows were of beautiful stained glass; and upon the walls were hanging the portraits of the former possessors of this noble building.

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Blue Beard's chosen love.

They ascended the staircase, the rails of which were of brass work, most curiously wrought, and most richly gilt; the stairs themselves were of Egyptian marble, covered with crimson velvet. They proceeded into a drawing room that completely surpassed their ideas of grandeur; almost every piece of furniture was of silver; the floor was covered with white velvet, but was ornamented with needle-work that must have occupied the labour of years; the curtains were of satin, but were adorned in a manner to correspond with the carpets: in short, every thing was more splendid than words can describe.

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The happy couple on their way home from church.

The party continued in the castle several days; during which there was a constant succession of the most pleasing amusements. Not an interval was allowed to pass without some kind of entertainment; music, singing, and dancing; banquets, consisting of every luxury, were in constant succession.

Blue Beard had not been inattentive to the ladies in his personal services: he seemed to watch every look, that he might know how to please his fair visitors. Such attentions could not fail to produce some favorable effect; for it seldom happens, that

the person who really desires to please, fails in pleasing.

When they were about to depart, Blue Beard entreated the younger of the two ladies that have been mentioned, to consent to become his wife. The splendor of every thing around her, the immense wealth she would have at command, and the attentions she had received during her visit, completely captivated the young lady, so that she no longer felt disposed to resist; and accordingly, with her mother's approbation, they were married. She, however, agreed that her sister should live with her in the castle.

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Blue Beard gives his wife the forbidden key.

It would be impossible to describe the magnificence with which this event was celebrated. The costly additions that were made to the furniture; the expensive dresses that were provided for the bride; and the sumptuous entertainments that were given to the company that attended, far exceeded all imaginary description. Indeed, there was scarcely any thing wanting for which she could have wished.

A new dining hall was prepared; and all the utensils of the table used upon the occasion, were manufactured of pure gold and silver: and persons were sent many miles to procure the greatest delicacies that could possibly be obtained.

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Mrs. Blue Beard examining her husband's treasures.

But the greatest solicitude was shown in preparing the attire of the intended bride. Whatever wealth could purchase, or ingenuity contrive, were provided to give to her natural charms all the embellishments which art could bestow.

Nor was Blue Beard himself unemployed: he not only gave orders for himself, but all his servants were provided with the richest clothes, according to their respective

situations.

Numerous as were his horses, additional ones were purchased; and new carriages of the grandest designs and the most costly materials, were prepared for his bride against the approaching happy day.

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Mrs. Blue Beard opens the door of the forbidden chamber.

When the morning arrived on which this interesting ceremony was to take place, the day had scarcely dawned when sounds of joy were heard. The servants arose to prepare for the series of magnificence that was to take place; but none of them were moving about earlier than the bride and bridegroom; who, as they were the most immediately interested, were also the most anxious, and therefore among the most early, in preparing for the events of the day.

The company assembled to breakfast, and every thing marked the magnificence of the occasion; and every countenance contributed to the general cheerfulness. The church in which the ceremony was to take place was at some distance. The company proceeded thither in ten carriages, each drawn by six horses, and attended by a great retinue of servants. The carriage in which the bride and bridegroom were seated, was drawn by Arabian horses; the harness was made of white silk, woven on purpose; the trappings were of pure silver; the carriage itself was chiefly formed of pearl, ivory, and silver; and was lined with white satin, beautifully embossed.

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Mrs. Blue Beard and her sister considerably astonished.

When the procession approached the church, it was met by one hundred young maidens, dressed in white, singing to a band of the most skilful musicians: and when the company alighted, the young maidens strewed flowers for them to walk upon.

When the ceremony was over, they returned in the same manner, and were treated with the same complimentary services: that the hearts of all might rejoice, the bride and bridegroom distributed money as they passed along.

The dinner far exceeded in sumptuousness all that imagination can conceive. In the different recesses of this noble apartment, artificial fountains were playing the most odoriferous waters. The most luxuriant fruit-trees, standing in vases of gold, invited the guests to pluck the delicious fruits they bore.

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The sight that astonished Mrs. Blue Beard and her sister.

In the evening, the company were introduced to a ball room. But so resplendent was this saloon, that on entering it, the eye was subdued by its incomparable radiance.

Transparencies, executed by the most eminent painters, charmed the attentive mind on every side; and the intervening spaces were filled up with variegated lamps, all of which were hung upon the surface of reflecting glass; while from the centre of the ceiling, a chandelier, suspended by a chain of gold, diffused the splendor of five hundred wax-lights. Here, also, were fountains of aromatic waters, and groves of exotic fruit-trees.

In this apartment, which seemed to realize the fabled stories of enchantment, dancing, and every other description of amusement, was continued, until folding windows opened, as if of their own accord, and disclosed a covered path through the most delightful part of the gardens, to a room in which supper was prepared: this path was entirely illuminated by splendid lamps; and the most brilliant fireworks were unremittingly discharged by artists engaged for the purpose.

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Blue Beard comes home.

The bride seemed to think that her life must necessarily consist of pleasure and happiness: indeed, she could imagine nothing that could be wanting to complete her wishes.

The utmost expectations of the young wife were fully gratified: every thing that she could wish for was hers, and her husband behaved with a kindness which made her feel truly happy.

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Mrs. Blue Beard in a quandary.

Some time after the marriage had taken place, however, Blue Beard informed his wife that he had occasion to take a journey on account of some business, to which he must attend; "but I beg you, my dearest Fatima, (for that was the young lady's name,) to have every sort of entertainment that can amuse you during my absence. Here are all the keys of the castle; you may therefore examine the different apartments which you have not seen; and I hope you will find some that will surprise and please you as well as those with which you are already acquainted. I must however most earnestly caution and require you not to open the blue closet at the end of the gallery; and although I leave the key of it with you, yet I trust you will have the prudence to fulfil my wishes in this particular. Remember this, as you value my love and your own life and happiness."

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Mr. Blue Beard in a passion.

Fatima promised that she would obey his desire. She thanked her husband for his kind attention to her comforts; and again promised that she would not disappoint the confidence he had placed in her, but would carefully abstain from examining the particular apartment he had named.

Blue Beard set off upon his journey; and Fatima having informed her sister of every thing that had passed in their late conversation, they agreed to invite their relatives and friends to an entertainment the next day; but more particularly their two brothers, who, having been absent from home as military officers, had not yet seen their sister's magnificent residence.

Having arranged every thing for their intended party, Fatima proposed that they should see the apartments of which she now had the keys. They accordingly proceeded to that part of the extensive castle which they had not as yet seen, and at last arrived at a most splendid suit of rooms, far surpassing those to which they had been accustomed.

On one side of one of these apartments they perceived a door, which they opened, and found behind it an iron gate of amazing strength. Among the keys Blue Beard had left, they found one which opened this massy portal.

When they entered the room which was before them, they were surprised to find it almost full of large iron chests: but their surprise was considerably increased when they had found, that they were full of gold, silver, and jewels; even the costliness of the apartments they had just quitted, seemed insignificant when compared with the riches which this treasury contained.

Having fastened the entrance to the treasury, they sat down and conversed upon what they had seen. Fatima could not avoid feeling that the personal deformity in Blue Beard was compensated by the vast wealth of which she was become the mistress; but both she and her sister were almost lost in admiration of the immeasurable riches they had lately beheld.

In returning to their usual apartments, they passed the door of the mysterious blue closet, which Blue Beard had cautioned his wife not to examine. They could not help expressing their mutual curiosity upon the interior of this particular chamber. It could not have been his wish to conceal any articles of value; as nothing could be more valuable than the contents of the treasury. After some deliberation, Fatima said that they could do no harm by merely looking inside; and although her sister reminded her of the promise she had made her husband, and of his express desire, yet she resolved to gratify her irresistible curiosity, and put the key to the door.

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Miss Anna on top of the tower, on the lookout for her brother.

She entered the closet, but it was too dark for her to discern any object; however, she could just perceive that there was a window, the shutters of which were closed: she went forward and removed them. The instant that light was admitted, her curiosity was gratified. She found herself amidst the severed limbs and mutilated bodies of her husband's former wives. The scene was frightful! Her own future condition, she immediately thought, might add to these dreadful objects! Her blood chilled! The very hair rose upon her head! Nor was her terror diminished, when she saw upon the wall these awful words—*The fate of broken promises and disobedient curiosity.*—She trembled excessively; and in the alarm of the moment, she let fall the key of the closet, which she had brought in her hand: she hastily snatched it from the



The Brother arrives.

Fatima hastened to her sister, who not choosing to partake of her sister's folly, had proceeded to their customary sitting-room. She related what she had seen; particularly the sentence which was on the wall. Her sister partook of her alarm; and feared that evil consequences would result from this unfortunate affair. She asked Fatima if she had closed the window-shutters and brought away the key: and returned every thing she had moved to its proper place; Fatima said she had; and, in proof of her answer to the inquiry, showed the key itself.

The key, however, was no sooner produced than they both turned pale with horror. This fatal instrument was covered with blood! and all their endeavours could not clear it of its condemning evidence.

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During the remainder of the evening they employed themselves in making every sort of exertion to restore the key to its former state; but all they could do was ineffectual; it still preserved the testimony of Fatima's indiscretion. At night they retired to bed; but no sleep did the wretched girls obtain. The splendor and riches of the castle lost all their charms; Fatima no longer prided herself upon her good fortune; she felt that no creature could be more miserable than she was. How soon Blue Beard would return, she had no means of conjecturing; it was not likely, however, that he would be at the castle again for some days to come; she therefore resolved to escape from this dreadful mansion as soon as the entertainment, which was appointed for the next day, should have taken place.

When she arose in the morning, she communicated to her sister the intention she had formed; and they both began to feel less dread than they had experienced since the discoveries in the fatal closet. The day advanced, and they looked forward to the arrival of the relatives and friends whom they had invited to this day's entertainment.

However, in the midst of their mutual congratulations upon the plan which had been formed, they heard the arrival of a carriage at the castle, and in a few moments Blue Beard himself entered their apartment. Fatima felt all the horror which the remembrance of the closet could excite, and all the shame which the consciousness of her own impropriety could not fail to produce.

Blue Beard did not seem to notice his wife's uneasiness; but with apparent good humour said, "that he had not proceeded very far, when he met a messenger who was coming to the castle to inform him that it was no longer necessary he should proceed on his intended journey; that he had therefore lost no time in returning home; where," he said, "Fatima's presence rendered him so peculiarly happy."

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Soon afterwards Blue Beard, as though he wanted something, asked his wife for the keys. She went to the chamber and returned with all of them excepting the one which belonged to the dreadful closet; for it still preserved the evidence of her disobedience. He took them with seeming good-natured indifference, and did not pretend to observe how the wretched girl trembled. As he held them in his hand, he said to her, with affected carelessness, "The key of the blue closet is not here; bring it to me in my dressing-room."

He arose and left the apartment in which they were sitting; and Fatima and her sister proceeded to her chamber. Again they tried to remove the blood with which the key was stained; but all their efforts were unavailing. At length Blue Beard called his wife, and as she and her sister were going to his dressing-room, they met him in the gallery, close to the stairs which led to the top of the castle.

As soon as she approached him, he threw off the disguise of good nature which he had assumed in the sitting room, and demanded the key of the closet. The tone of voice in which this was uttered, struck upon her ear like the knell for her execution; she seemed to be deprived of the power of speaking. He became impatient, and seizing her hand, took from it the blood-stained key. The wretched girl fell upon her knees, the tears rushed into her eyes, and enabled her to speak; but by this time Blue Beard stood over her with his sword unsheathed.

Fatima's sister, as she stood by, almost petrified, gave a dreadful shriek when she saw the instrument of death raised over her defenceless sister. The sound caught the ear of Blue Beard; and for a moment his intention was suspended. Looking upon his wretched victim, "Where," said he, "was your promise, when you were fool enough to enter the closet? and where was the obedience you promised to pay me, when you suffered your curiosity to overcome your duty? But you shall commit no more crimes; therefore receive *the fate of broken promises, and disobedient curiosity.*"

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These last words roused the almost inanimate girl; she recollected that she had seen them on the wall of the fatal closet. He was now about to fulfil his sentence; his arm was again uplifted; when she entreated him to spare her for a few minutes, to prepare for this unexpected end. He consented, after much entreaty, to allow her a quarter of an hour. As soon as this indulgence was given her, she begged her sister to ascend the staircase to the top of the castle, and see if any of their friends were to be seen. She did so; but no signs of a human being could be perceived.

At length the short interval which had been allowed her came to an end, and Blue Beard approached to complete his determination. She again implored mercy, and he, knowing that she was in his power, gave her five minutes more. She now renewed her frenzied enquiries to her sister; "Is no one coming?" asked she. After a short time her sister told her that she saw something approaching; which cheered the heart of the unhappy girl. Alas! it was but transient,—it was a flock of sheep.

Blue Beard's patience was now exhausted; and he came to the foot of the tower where Fatima was; when her sister called out, "I see two horsemen coming." "Make signs for them to hasten," shrieked the miserable girl.

Her brutal husband had now caught her by the hair of her head, and in spite of her heart-rending cries for mercy, was about to strike at her with his scymitar, when two men in soldiers' uniform rushed to the spot, and plunged their swords in the breast of the relentless Blue Beard.

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The monster had still sufficient life to speak: he raised himself on one arm, and looking on them all, thus spoke: "I am at last justly punished. By the splendor of my riches, I have induced many a beautiful woman to become my wife; but as soon as I discovered the least deviation from truth, or disobedience to my will, she suffered death. I put Fatima's veracity to the test, by obtaining her promise that she would not open the door of the blue closet; and by leaving the key with her, she broke her word, and the key, which has the property of preserving the stains of blood, until it be rubbed with a peculiar oil, afforded the evidence of her guilt. By the same means I knew that she had disobeyed my orders, and broken her own promises. These two faults had incurred my revenge. She has had a narrow escape; yet I hope she will in future never break a promise, disobey those to whom she promises submission, nor give way to the impulse of improper or forbidden curiosity."

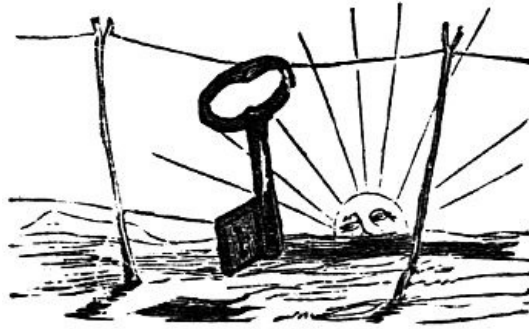
He grew faint; and having uttered a few prayers for forgiveness, he fell back, and expired.

During the day, all the friends who had been invited arrived. They were told the occurrences which had happened; and such of them as chose it, saw the horrid proofs of Blue Beard's cruelty.

Fatima shortly afterwards had a day of great rejoicing; she not only gave a magnificent entertainment to her relations and friends, but the poor, for miles round, were collected together to partake of her hospitality: and on this occasion every face glowed with smiles of happiness.

Fatima's former days had showed her the sufferings and privations of the poor; and now she had the power, she determined to better their condition. With this view, instead of the miserable hovels usually inhabited by the labouring poor, she had annually several comfortable and pleasant cottages built, and to each one she added, a large plot of ground. To every labouring family upon her extensive estates, she gave one of these cottages, and where there were a family of children, she added to this gift a cow, and a few sheep. By this means, she enabled them, by their own exertions, instead of occasional want, always to secure a humble competence; and in a very short time, every person upon her estate was rendered happy, and became her firm friend.

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