

The story of Blue Beard – A gripping tale from the past

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Blue Beard is a wealthy man who lives in a magnificent castle. Everyone fears him because he is a very ugly man with a big, blue beard, and all his earlier wives have mysteriously disappeared. Now he has laid his eyes on the beautiful daughters of one of his neighbours. Read on to discover what happens!

Once upon a time there lived a man who owned splendid town and country houses, gold and silver plate, tapestries and coaches gilt all over. But the poor fellow had a blue beard, and this made him so frightfully ugly that none of the ladies in the neighbourhood would venture to go into his company. Amongst his neighbours was a lady of high degree who had two extremely beautiful daughters. He asked for the hand of one of these in marriage, leaving it to their mother to choose which daughter should be bestowed upon him. Both girls, however, raised objections, and his offer was bandied from one to the other, neither being able to bring herself to accept a man with a blue beard. Another reason for their distaste was the fact that he had already married several wives, and no one knew what had become of them.

In order that they might become better acquainted, Blue Beard invited the two girls, with their mother and three or four of their best friends, to meet a party of young men from the neighbourhood at one of his country houses. Here they spent eight whole days, and throughout their stay there was a constant round of picnics, hunting and fishing expeditions, dances, dinners, and luncheons. They never slept, but spent the night playing merry pranks upon each other. In short, the time passed so agreeably that the younger daughter began to think the master of the house had not so very blue a beard after all, and that he was in fact an exceedingly agreeable man. As soon as the party returned to town, she accepted Blue Beard's proposal of marriage.

About a month after the marriage had taken place, Blue Beard informed his wife that he had to leave her for a few weeks, as he had some business to do in a distant country. He begged her to amuse herself well during his absence, and suggested that she should invite some of her friends and take them, if she liked, to the country. "Here," he said, "are the keys to the two large storerooms, and here is the key to the strongboxes where my gold and silver is kept. This key is to the caskets containing my jewels, and this one is the master key, which gives admittance to all the apartments—but this small key belongs to the door of the closet at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor. You may open everything, you may go everywhere, but I forbid you to enter this little room. Should you disobey me, expect the most dreadful of punishments." She promised to follow these instructions in the most faithful manner and, after embracing her, Blue Beard stepped into his coach and proceeded on his journey.

The friends of the bride could not wait to be invited, so impatient were they to see all the riches and magnificence she had gained by her marriage. They had not dared to venture while

her husband was there, for his blue beard frightened them so. No sooner had they arrived than they ran impatiently from room to room, and from wardrobe to wardrobe, declaring that the last was still richer and more beautiful than that which they had seen the moment before. There were mirrors in which they could view themselves from top to toe, some with frames of plate glass, others with frames of silver and gilt lacquer. They were the most superb and beautiful objects that they had ever seen.

In short, nothing could exceed the magnificence of what they saw, and the visitors did not cease to extol and envy the good fortune of their friend, who in the meantime was far from being amused by their fine compliments. In fact, so great indeed was her curiosity about the mysterious closet that, forgetting how impolite it would be to leave her guests, she descended a private staircase that led to the room. She was in such a hurry that she was two or three times in danger of breaking her neck.

When she reached the door of the closet, she paused for a while, thinking of the orders her husband had given her, and reflecting what harm might come to her as a result of her disobedience. But she was so very curious to know what was inside, that she decided to venture in. With a trembling hand, she put the key into the lock, and the door opened immediately.

The window shutters being closed, she at first saw nothing; but in a short time she saw that the floor was covered with dried blood, on which the bodies of several dead women lay. These were all the wives whom Blue Beard had married and murdered, one after another. She thought that she should have died of fear, and the key of the closet door, which she held in her hand, fell to the floor.

When she had somewhat regained her senses, she picked up the key, closed the door, and went upstairs to her chamber to compose herself a little. But this she could not do, for her nerves were too shaken. 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 disappear. In vain did she wash it and scrub it, but the blood still remained, for the key was bewitched, and she could never make it clean; when the blood was wiped from one side, it appeared again on the other.

That very same evening, Blue Beard returned from his journey. He had received some letters on the way, he said, informing him that the affair he went about was finished to his advantage. His wife did everything she could to make it appear that she was delighted by his speedy return. The next day he asked for the keys, which his wife returned, but with such a trembling hand that he easily guessed what had happened. "How is it," he said, "that the key of the little closet is not here amongst the rest?" "I must have left it upstairs upon my dressing table," she said. "Be sure to give it to me later." said Blue Beard.

After going several times backwards and forward, pretending to look for the key, she was at last obliged to give it to Blue Beard. He looked at it attentively, and then asked, "How came the blood upon this key?" "I'm sure I do not know," replied the poor wife, paler than death. "You do not know?" exclaimed Blue Beard, "I know well enough. You entered the closet on the ground floor! Very well, madame, enter it you shall—you shall go and take your place among the ladies you saw there!"

Upon this she threw herself at her husband's feet, begging his pardon with tears for her disobedience. She would have melted any heart, so beautiful and sorrowful was she, but Blue

Beard had a heart harder than any stone. "You must die, madame," he said, "and at once." "Since I must die," she replied, gazing at him with eyes that were bathed in tears, "allow me at least a little time to say my prayers." "I give you one quarter of an hour," replied Blue Beard, "but not a moment longer."

When the poor girl was left alone, she called her sister to her and said: "Sister Anne," (for that was her name), "go up, I implore you, to the top of the tower, and see if my brothers are yet in sight, for they promised to come and visit me today. If you see them, make signs to them to hasten." Her sister did as she was asked, and the poor unhappy girl cried out to her from time to time, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" and her sister replied, "I see nought but the dust in the sun and the grass that grows green."

Presently, Blue Beard, grasping a great cutlass, cried out at the top of his voice, "Come down instantly, or I shall come and fetch you." "Oh please, one moment more," called out his wife, and again called softly to her sister, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" "I see nought but the dust in the sun and the grass that grows green," replied her sister.

"Come down at once, I say," shouted Blue Beard, "or I will come upstairs myself." "I am coming," replied his wife. Then she called again to her sister, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" "I see," replied her sister, "a great cloud of dust which comes this way." "Is it my brothers?" "Alas, sister, no; it is but a flock of sheep."

"Do you refuse to come down?" roared Blue Beard. "One little moment more," exclaimed his wife. Once more she cried, "Anne, sister Anne, do you see anyone coming?" "I see," replied her sister, "two men on horseback coming this way, but they are still at a great distance." "Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed a moment later, "They are my brothers! I am signalling to them all I can to hasten."

Blue Beard let forth so mighty a roar that the whole house shook. The poor wife went down and threw herself at his feet, in tears. "That avails you nothing," said Blue Beard, "you must die." Seizing her by the hair with one hand, and holding the cutlass with the other, Blue Beard prepared to cut off her head. The poor girl, turning towards him, begged for a brief moment in which to collect her thoughts. "No! No!" cried Blue Beard, "I will give you no more time. Commend your soul to Heaven."

Again he raised his arm. At this very moment there came so loud a knocking at the gate that Blue Beard stopped short. The gate was opened, two horsemen entered, drew their swords, and rode straight at Blue Beard. He recognised them as the brothers of his wife, and fled instantly in an effort to save himself. But the two brothers were so close upon him that they caught him before he had gone twenty steps. They plunged their swords into his body, and Blue Beard fell down dead at their feet. The poor wife, who was nearly as dead as her husband, had not the strength to rise and embrace her brothers.

It was found that Blue Beard had no heirs, so his wife became mistress of all of his estate. She gave some of her vast fortune in a marriage dowry to her sister Anne, who soon after became the wife of a young gentleman who had been in love with her for a long time. Another part she used to buy commissions for each of her brothers. The rest formed a dowry for her own marriage with a very worthy man, whose kind treatment soon made her forget Blue Beard's cruelty.

Suggested topics for philosophical discussion

1. Despite Blue Beard's frightening looks and bad reputation, the young girl agrees to marry him. Perhaps she thought that a man that had so much wealth could not be that bad after all? What do you think?

How do we tell if people are good or bad? Can we tell it by what they do, by what they say, by how they speak, by what they have done before, by the way they look, by what they wear, by what they like, or by what they fear? Would you have married someone just because s/he was very rich?

2. After her guests have left, she enters the forbidden room even though Blue Beard had told her not to. Why do you think she did this? Apart from the fact that Blue Beard had forbidden her to enter the mysterious closet, can you think of any other reason why she should not have entered the room? Because she respected his wish? Because she loved him? Can love sometimes be stronger than curiosity? What is the strongest emotion a person can have?

Is curiosity always aroused when something is forbidden? What else arouses curiosity: thirst for knowledge, envy, jealousy, insecurity, anger? What makes you curious? Is curiosity always a good thing?

3. When Blue Beard finds out that she has been up to while he was away, he wants to execute her. But her brothers manage to enter the house, kill Blue Beard and save their dear sister.

Blue Beard was finally punished for all his horrible crimes, yet his wife was not punished for her small "crime" of entering the forbidden closet. Should she have been punished too? Why, or why not? Is it acceptable to do something evil against persons who are themselves evil?