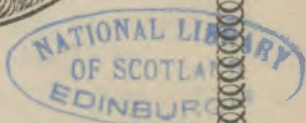


THE
STORY
OF
BLUE BEARD;
OR, THE
EFFECTS OF FEMALE CURIOSITY.
TO WHICH IS ADDED
THE MURDER HOLE
AN ANCIENT LEGEND.



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THE STORY OF
BLUE BEARD.

THERE was, some time ago, a gentleman who was extremely rich: he had elegant town and country-houses; his dishes and plates were 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 magnificently gilt with gold.

But, unfortunately, this gentleman had a blue beard, which made him so very frightful and ugly, that none of the ladies in the neighbourhood would venture to go into his company.

It happened that a lady of quality, who lived very near him, had two daughters, who were both extremely beautiful. Blue Beard asked her to bestow one of them upon him in marriage, leaving to herself the choice which of the two it should be.

They both, however, again and again refused to marry Blue Beard; but to be as civil as possible, they each pretended that they refused because she would not deprive

her sister of the opportunity of marrying so much to her advantage. But the truth was, they could not bear the thought of having a husband with a blue beard; and, besides, they had heard of his having already been married to several wives, and nobody could tell what had afterwards become of them.

As Blue Beard wished very much to gain their favour, he invited the lady and her daughters, and some ladies who were on a visit at their house, to accompany him to one of his country seats, where they spent a whole week; during which nothing was thought of but parties for hunting and fishing, music, dancing, collations, and the most delightful entertainments. No one thought of going to bed, and the nights were passed in merriment of every kind.

In short, the time had passed so agreeably, that the youngest of the two sisters began to think that the beard which had so much terrified her was not so very blue; and that the gentleman to whom it belonged was vastly civil and pleasing.

Soon after they returned home, she told her mother that she had no longer any objection to accept of Blue Beard for her husband; and accordingly in a short time they were married.

About a month after the marriage had

taken place, Blue Beard told his wife that she should be obliged to leave her for a few weeks, as he had some business to do in the country. He desired her to be sure to procure herself every kind of amusement; to invite as many of her friends as she liked, and to treat them with all sorts of delicacies, that the time might pass agreeably during his absence. "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 to the casket in which are all my jewels. Here also is a master key to all the apartments in my house;—but this small key belongs to the closet at the end of the long gallery on the ground floor. I give you leave," continued he, "to go out or do what you like with all the rest excepting this closet: this, my dear, you must not enter, nor even put the key into the lock, for all the world. Should you disobey me, expect the most dreadful of punishments."

She promised to obey his orders in the most faithful manner; and Blue Beard, after tenderly embracing her, stepped into his carriage and drove away. The friends of the bride did not, on this occasion, wait to be invited, so impatient were they to see all the riches and magur-

ficence she had gained by marriage; for they had been prevented from paying their wedding visit by their aversion to the blue beard of the bridegroom.

No sooner were they arrived than they impatiently ran from room to room, from cabinet to cabinet, and then from wardrobe to wardrobe, examining each with the utmost curiosity, and declaring that the last was still richer and more beautiful than what they had seen the moment before. At length they came to the drawing-rooms, where their admiration and astonishment were still increased by the costly splendour of the hangings, of the sofas, the chairs, carpets, tables, girandoles, and looking-glasses, the frames of which were silver gilt, most richly ornamented, and in which they saw themselves from head to foot.

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 all this time was far from being amused by the fine compliments they paid her, so eagerly did she desire to see what was in the closet her husband had forbidden her to open. So great indeed was her curiosity, that, without recollecting how uncivil it would be to leave her guests, she descended a private staircase that led to it, and 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 stopped for a few moments to think of the charge her husband had given her, and that he would not fail to keep his word in punishing her very severely, should she disobey him. But she was so very curious to know what was in the inside, that she determined to venture in spite of every thing.

She accordingly, with a trembling hand, put the key into the lock, and the door immediately opened. The window-shutters being closed, she at first saw nothing; but in a short time she perceived 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 murdered, one after another. 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 somewhat recovered from her fright, she took it up, locked the door, and hastened to her own room, that she might have a little time to get into humour for amusing her visitors; but this she found impossible, so greatly was she terrified by what she had seen.

As she observed 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; still, however, the blood remained the same as before; she next washed it, but the blood did not stir at all; she then scoured it with brickdust, and afterwards with sand, but notwithstanding 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 it off on one side, it appeared again on the other.

Early in the evening Blue Beard returned home, saying he had not proceeded far on his journey before he was met by a messenger who was coming to tell him that his business was happily concluded without his being present: upon which his wife said every thing she could think of, to make him believe she was transported with joy at his unexpected 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 happened. "How is it," said he, "that the key of the closet upon the ground-floor is not here?" "Is it not? then I must have left it on my dressing-table," said she, and left the room in tears. "Be sure you give it me by and by," cried Blue Beard.

After going several times backwards and forwards, pretending to look for the key, she was at last obliged to give it to Blue Beard.

He looked at it attentively, and then said. "How came the blood upon the key?" "I am sure I do not know," replied the lady, turning at the same time as pale as death. "You do not know," said Blue Beard sternly; "but I know well enough. You have been in the closet on the ground-floor: Vastly well, madam; since you are so mightily fond of this closet, you shall certainly take your place among the ladies you saw there."

His wife, almost dead with fear, fell upon her knees; asked his pardon a thousand times for her disobedience, and entreated him to forgive her; looking all the time so very sorrowful and lovely, that she would have melted any heart that was not harder than a rock.

But Blue Beard answered; "No, no; madam; you shall die this very minute!"

"Alas!" said the poor trembling creature; "if I must die, allow me, at least, a little time to say my prayers."

"I give you," replied the cruel Blue Beard, "half a quarter of an hour; not one 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; "Pr'ythee," said she, "sister Ann," (this was her sister's name,) "run up to the top of the tower, and see if my brothers are yet

in sight; for they promised to come and visit me to-day; and if you see them make a sign for them to gallop as fast as possible."

Her sister instantly did as she was desired, and the terrified lady every minute called out to her, "Ann! sister Ann! do you see any one coming?" and her sister answered, "I see nothing but the sun, which makes a dust, and the grass which looks green."

In the meanwhile, Blue Beard, with a great scimeter in his hand, bawled as loud as he could to his wife "Come down instantly; or I will fetch you."

"One moment longer, I beseech you," replied she; and again called softly to her sister: "Sister Ann, 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 and fetch you."

"I am coming: indeed I will come in one minute;" sobbed his unhappy wife. Then she once more cried out, "Ann! sister Ann! 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?" continued the wife. "Alas! no, dear sister," replied she; "it is only a flock of sheep."

“Will you come down or not, madam?” said Blue Beard, in the greatest rage imaginable.

“Only one single moment more,” answered she. And then she called out for the last time, “Sister Ann! do you see any one coming?”

“I see,” replied her sister, “two men on horseback coming to the house; but they are still at a great distance.”

“God be praised!” cried she; it is my brothers: give them a sign to make what haste they can.

At the same moment Blue Beard cried out so loud for her to come down, that his voice shook the whole house.

The poor lady with her hair loose, and her eyes swimming in tears, instantly came down, and fell on her knees to Blue Beard, and was going to beg him to spare her life; but he interrupted her saying, “All this is no use at all, for you shall die:” then seizing her with one hand by the hair, and raising the scimeter he held in the other, was going with one blow to strike off her head.

The unfortunate creature turning towards him, desired to have a single moment allowed her to recollect herself.

“No, no,” said Blue Beard, “I will give you no more time, I am determined—you have had too much already;” and again

raising 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 were opened, and two officers, dressed in their regimentals, entered, and, with their swords in their hands ran instantly to Blue Beard; who seeing they were his wife's brothers, endeavoured 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 immediately fell down dead at their feet.

The poor wife who was almost as dead as her husband, was unable at first to rise and embrace her brothers. She soon, however, recovered; and as Blue Beard had no heirs, she found herself the lawful possessor of his great riches.

She employed a portion of her vast fortune in giving a marriage dowry to her sister Ann, who soon after became the wife of a young gentleman by whom she had long been beloved. Another part she employed in buying captains' commissions for her two brothers; and the rest she presented to a most worthy gentleman, whom she married soon after, and whose kind treatment soon made her forget Blue Beard's cruelty.

THE MURDER HOLE.

AN ANCIENT LEGEND.

In a remote district of country belonging to Lord Cassillis, between Ayrshire and Galloway, about three hundred years ago, a moor of apparently boundless extent stretched several miles along the road, and wearied the eye of the traveller by the sameness and desolation of its appearance; not a tree varied the prospect--not a shrub enlivened the eye by its freshness--nor a native flower bloomed to adorn this ungenial soil. One 'lonesome desert' reached the horizon on every side, with nothing to mark that any mortal had ever visited the scene before, except a few rude huts that were scattered near its centre; and a road, or rather pathway, for those whom business or necessity obliged to pass in that direction. At length, deserted as this wild region had always been, it became still more gloomy. Strange rumours arose, that the path of unwary travellers had been beset on this 'blasted heath,' and that treachery, and murder had intercepted the solitary stranger as he traversed its dreary

extent. When several persons, who were known to have passed that way, mysteriously disappeared, the enquiries of their relatives led to a strict and anxious investigation: but though the officers of justice were sent to scour the country, and examine the inhabitants, not a trace could be obtained of the persons in question, nor of any place of concealment which could be a refuge for the lawless or desperate to horde in. Yet, as inquiry became stricter, and the disappearance of individuals more frequent, the simple inhabitants of the neighbouring hamlet were agitated by the most fearful apprehensions. Some declared that the death-like stillness of the night was often interrupted by the sudden and preternatural cries of more than mortal anguish, which seemed to arise in the distance; and a shepherd, one evening, who had lost his way on the moor, declared he had approached three mysterious figures, whose seemed struggling against each other with supernatural energy, till at length one of them, with a frightful scream, suddenly sunk into the earth.

Gradually the inhabitants deserted their dwellings on the heath, and settled in distant quarters, till at length but one of the cottages continued to be inhabited by an old woman and her two sons, who loudly lamented that poverty chained them to this

solitary spot. Travellers who frequented this road now generally did so in groups, to protect each other: and if night overtook them, they usually stopped at the humble cottage of the old woman and her sons, where cleanliness compensated for the want of luxury, and where, over a blazing fire of peat, the bolder spirits smiled at the imaginary terrors of the road, and the more timid trembled as they listened to the tales of terror and affright with which their hosts entertained them.

One gloomy and tempestuous night in November, a pedlar boy hastily traversed the moor. Terrified to find himself involved in darkness amidst its boundless wastes, a thousand frightful traditions connected with this dreary scene, darted across his mind---every blast, as it swept in hollow gusts over the heath, seemed to teem with the sighs of departed spirits---and the birds, as they winged their way above his head, appeared, with loud and shrill cries, to warn him of approaching danger. The whistle with which he usually beguiled his weary pilgrimage, died away in silence, and he groped with trembling and uncertain steps, which sounded too loudly in his ears. The promise of Scripture occurred to his memory, and he revived his courage.---‘I will be unto thee as a rock in the desert, and as a

place of safety.' This heart-consoling promise inspired him with confidence, and he continued for a time to make, with renewed vigour his way across the moor. At length, however, wearied and faint through fatigue, he was compelled to cast his pack on the ground, and in the midst of the pitiless storm rested himself thereon. Thus situated, he frequently, and with much anxiety looked, to see, that if perchance, some place of shelter might be near, but nothing met his eye but darkness, and that occasionally made more visible and fearful by the lightning, which ever anon struck through the gloom.

Resigning himself to his unhappy fate, the poor benighted pedlar boy, anticipated nothing but perishing ere the cheering light of day should again lighten the earth.

Despair had a second time nearly taken possession of his soul, when he suddenly started to his feet, and turning round, to his great astonishment and joy, the light of a taper appeared to come from a spot not far distant: a few minutes' walk brought him to the window whence the light issued, he looked in and saw several individuals busily engaged drinking round a cheerful fire. He now made for the door, which when he came at was firm

ly locked. The boy in a frolicsome mood, thoughtlessly tapped at the window, when they all instantly started up with consternation strongly depicted on their countenances, that he shrunk back involuntarily with an undefined feeling of apprehension; but before he had time to reflect a moment longer, one of the men suddenly darted out of the door, and seizing the boy roughly by the shoulder, dragged him violently into the cottage. 'I am not what you take me for,' said the boy, attempting to laugh, 'but only the poor pedlar who visited you last year.' 'Are you alone?' enquired the old woman in a harsh deep tone, which made his heart thrill with apprehension. 'Yes,' said the boy, 'I am alone here; and alas!' he added with a burst of uncontrolable feeling, 'I am alone in the wide world also! Not a person exists who would assist me in distress, or shed a single tear if I died this very night.' 'Then you are welcome!' said one of the men with a sneer, while he cast a glance of peculiar expression at the other inhabitants of the cottage.

It was with a shiver of apprehension, rather than of cold, that the boy drew towards the fire, and the locks which the old woman and her sons exchanged, made him wish that he had preferred the shelter of any one of the roofless cottages which were scat-

tered near, rather than trust himself among persons of such dubious aspect.---Dreadful surmises flitted across his brain; and terrors which he could neither combat nor examine imperceptibly stole into his mind; but alone, and beyond the reach of assistance, he resolved to smother his suspicions, or at least not increase the danger by revealing them. The room to which he retired for the night had a confused and desolate aspect; the curtains seemed to have been violently torn down from the bed, and still hung in tatters around it---the table seemed to have been broken by some violent concussion, and the fragments of various pieces of furniture lay scattered upon the floor. The boy begged that a light might burn in his apartment till he was asleep, and anxiously examined the fastenings of the door; but they seemed to have been wrenched asunder on some former occasion, and were still left rusty and broken. It was long ere the pedlar attempted to compose his agitated nerves to rest; but at length his senses began to 'steep themselves in forgetfulness,' though his imagination remained painfully active, and presented new scenes of terror to his mind, with all the vividness of reality. He fancied himself again wandering on the heath, which appeared to be peopled with spectres, who all beckoned to him not to enter the cottage,

and as he approached it, they vanished with a hollow and despairing cry. The scene then changed, and he found himself again seated by the fire, where the countenances of the men scowled upon him with the most terrifying malignity, and he thought the old woman suddenly seized him by the arms, and pinioned them to his side. Suddenly the boy was startled from these agitated slumbers, by what sounded to him like a cry of distress; he was broad awake in a moment, and sat up in bed,---but the noise was not repeated, and he endeavoured to persuade himself it had only been a continuation of the fearful images which had disturbed his rest, when on glancing at the door, he observed underneath it, a broad red stream of blood silently stealing its course along the floor. Frantic with alarm, it was but the work of a moment to spring from his bed, and rush to the door, through a chink of which, his eye nearly dimmed with affright, he could watch unsuspected, whatever might be done in the adjoining room.

His fear vanished instantly when he perceived that it was only a goat that they had been slaughtering; and he was about to steal into his bed again, ashamed of his groundless apprehensions, when his ear was arrested by a conversation which transfixed him almost with terror to the spot.

'This is an easier job than you had yesterday,' said the man who held the goat. 'I wish all the throats we've cut were as easily and quietly done. Did you ever hear such a noise as the old gentleman made last night! It was well we had no neighbour within a dozen of miles, or they must have heard his cries for help and mercy.'

'Don't speak of it,' replied the other; 'I was never fond of bloodshed.'

'Ha! ha!' said the other with a sneer, 'you say so, do you?'

'I do,' answered the first gloomily; 'the Murder Hole is the thing for me--that tells no tales--a single scuffle--a single plunge--and the fellow is dead and buried to your hand in a moment. I would defy all the officers in Christendom to discover any mischief there.'

'Ay, Nature did us a good turn when she contrived such a place as that. Who that saw a hole in the heath, filled with clear water, and so small that the long grass meets over the top of it, would suppose that the depth is unfathomable, and that it conceals more than forty people who have met their deaths there?--it sucks them in like a leech!'

'How do you mean to dispatch the lad in the next room?' asked the old woman in an under tone. The elder son made her a sign

to be silent, and pointed towards the door where their trembling auditor was concealed, while the other, with an expression of brutal ferocity, passed the blood-knife across his throat.

The pedlar boy possessed a bold and daring spirit, which was now roused to desperation; but in any open resistance the odds were so completely against him, that flight seemed his best resource. He gently stole to the window, and having by one desperate effort broke the rusty bolt by which the casement had been fastened, he let himself down without noise or difficulty. This betokens good, thought he, pausing an instant in dreadful hesitation what direction to take. This momentary deliberation was fearfully interrupted by the hoarse voice of the men calling aloud, "The boy has fled---let loose the blood-hound!" These words sunk like a death-knell on his heart, for escape appeared now impossible, and his nerves seemed to melt away like wax in a furnace. Shall I perish without a struggle! thought he, rousing himself to exertion, and, helpless and terrified as a hare pursued by its ruthless hunters, he fled across the heath. Soon the baying of the blood-hound broke the stillness of the night, and the voice of its masters sounded through the moor, as they endeavoured to accelerate its speed,---panting and

breathless the boy pursued his hopeless career, but every moment his pursuers seemed to gain upon his failing steps. The hound was unimpeded by the darkness, which was to him so impenetrable, and its noise rung louder and deeper on his ear---while the lanterns which were carried by the men gleamed near and distinct upon his vision.

At his fullest speed, the terrified boy fell with violence over a heap of stones, and having nothing on but his shirt, he was severely cut in every limb. With one wild cry to heaven for assistance, he continued prostrate on the earth, bleeding, and nearly insensible. The hoarse voices of the men, and the still louder baying of the dog, were now so near, that instant destruction seemed inevitable,---already he felt himself in their fangs, and the bloody knife of the assassin appeared to gleam before his eyes,---despair renewed his energy, and once more, in an agony of affright that seemed verging towards madness, he rushed forward so rapidly that terror seemed to have given wings to his feet. A loud cry near the spot he had left arose on his ears without suspending his flight. The hound had stopped at the place where the Pedlar's wounds bled so profusely, and deeming the chase now over, it lay down there, and could not be induced to proceed; in vain the men beat it

with frantic violence, and tried again to put the hound on the scent,---the sight of blood had satisfied the animal that its work was done, and with dogged resolution it resisted every inducement to pursue the same scent a second time. The pedlar boy in the meantime paused not in his flight till morning dawned---and still as he fled, the noise of steps seemed to pursue him, and the cry of his assassins still sounded in the distance. Ten miles off he reached a village, and spread instant alarm throughout the neighbourhood---the inhabitants were aroused with one accord into a tumult of indignation---several of them had lost sons, brothers, or friends on the heath, and all united in proceeding instantly to seize the old woman and her sons, who were nearly torn to pieces by their violence. Three gibbets were immediately raised on the moor, and the wretched culprits confessed before their execution to the destruction of nearly fifty victims in the Murder Hole which they pointed out, and near which they suffered the penalty of their crimes. The bones of several murdered persons were with difficulty brought up from the abyss into which they had been thrust; but so narrow is the aperture, and so extraordinary the depth, that all who see it are inclined to coincide in the tradition of the country people that it is unfathomable.

The scene of these events still continues nearly as it was 300 years ago. The remains of the old cottage, with its blackened walls, (haunted of course by a thousand evil spirits,) and the extensive moor, on which a more modern inn (if it can be dignified with an epithet) resembles its predecessor in every thing but the character of its inhabitants; the landlord is deformed, but possesses extraordinary genius; he has himself manufactured a violin, on which he plays with untaught skill,---and if any discord be heard in the house, or any murder committed in it, this is his only instrument. His daughter has inherited her father's talent, and learnt all his tales of terror and superstition, which she relates with infinite spirit; when she describes, with all the animation of an eye-witness, the struggle of the victims grasping the grass as a last hope of preservation, and trying to drag in their assassin as an expiring effort of vengeance,---when you are told that for three hundred years the clear waters in this diamond of the desert have remained untasted by mortal lips, and that the solitary traveller is still pursued at night by the howling of the blood hound, ---it is then only that it is possible fully to appreciate the terrors of THE MURDER HOLE.