

THERE ONCE WAS A MAN who lived in a forest with his three sons and beautiful daughter. One day a golden coach drawn by six horses and attended by several servants came driving up to his house. After the coach stopped, a king stepped out and asked him if he could have his daughter for his wife. The man was happy that his daughter could benefit from such a stroke of good fortune and immediately said yes. There was nothing objectionable about the suitor except for his beard, which was all blue and made one shudder somewhat whenever one looked at it. At first the maiden also felt frightened by it and resisted marrying him. But her father kept urging her, and finally she consented. However, her fear was so great that she first went to her

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brothers, took them aside, and said, "Dear brothers, if you hear me scream, leave everything standing or lying wherever you are, and come to my aid."

The brothers kissed her and promised to do this. "Farewell, dear sister, if we hear your voice, we'll jump on our horses and soon be at your side."

Then she got into the coach, sat down next to Bluebeard, and drove away with him. When she reached his castle, she found everything splendid, and whatever the queen desired was fulfilled. They would have been very happy together if she could only have accustomed herself to the king's blue beard. However, whenever she saw it, she felt frightened.

After some time had passed, he said to her, "I must go on a great journey. Here are the keys to the entire castle. You can open all the rooms and look at everything. But I forbid you to open one particular room, which this little golden key can unlock. If you open it, you will pay for it with your life."

She took the key and promised to obey him. Once he had departed, she opened one door after another and saw so many treasures and magnificent things that she thought they must have been gathered from all over the world. Soon nothing was left but the forbidden room. Since the key was made of gold, she believed that the most precious things were probably kept there. Her curiosity began to gnaw at her, and she would certainly have passed over all the other rooms if she could only have seen what was in this one. At last her desire became so strong that she took the key and went to the room. "Who can possibly see when I open it?" she said to herself. "I'll just glance inside." Then she unlocked the room, and when the door opened, a stream of blood flowed toward her, and she saw dead women hanging along all the walls, some only skeletons. Her horror was so tremendous that she immediately slammed the door, but the key popped out of the lock and fell into the blood. Swiftly she picked it up and tried to wipe away the blood, but to no avail. When she wiped the blood away on one side, it appeared on the other. She sat down, rubbed the key throughout the day, and tried everything possible, but nothing helped: the bloodstains could not be eliminated. Finally, in the evening she stuck it into some hay, which was supposed to be able to absorb blood.

The following day Bluebeard came back, and the first thing he requested was the bunch of keys. Her heart pounded as she brought the keys, and she hoped he would not notice that the golden one was missing. However, he counted all of them, and when he was finished, he said, "Where's the key to the secret room?"

As he said this he looked straight into her face, causing her to blush red as blood.



"It's upstairs," she answered. "I misplaced it. Tomorrow I'll go and look for it."

"You'd better go now, dear wife. I need it today."

"Oh, I might as well tell you. I lost it in the hay. I'll have to go and search for it first."

"You haven't lost it," Bluebeard said angrily. "You stuck it there so the hay would absorb the bloodstains. It's clear that you've disobeyed my command and entered the room. Now, you will enter the room whether you want to or not."

Then he ordered her to fetch the key, which was still stained with blood.

"Now prepare yourself for your death. You shall die today," Bluebeard declared. He fetched his big knife and took her to the threshold of the house.

"Just let me say my prayers before I die," she said.

"All right. Go ahead, but you'd better hurry. I don't have much time to waste."

She ran upstairs and cried out of the window as loud as she could, "Brothers, my dear brothers! Come help me!"

The brothers were sitting in the forest and drinking some cool wine. The youngest said, "I think I heard our sister's voice. Let's go! We must hurry and help her!"

They jumped on their horses and rode like a turbulent wind. Meanwhile, their sister was on her knees, praying in fear.

"Well, are you almost done?" Bluebeard called from below, and she heard him sharpening his knife on the bottom step. She looked out the window but could see only a cloud of dust as if a herd were coming. So she screamed once again, "Brothers, my dear brothers! Come help me!"

And her fear became greater and greater when Bluebeard called, "If you don't come down soon, I'll be up to get you. My knife's been sharpened!"

She looked out the window again and saw her three brothers riding across the field as though they were birds flying through the air. For the third time she screamed desperately and with all her might, "Brothers, my dear brothers! Come help me!"

The youngest brother was already so near that she could hear his voice. "Calm yourself. Another moment, dear sister, and we'll be at your side!"

But Bluebeard cried out, "That's enough praying! I'm not going to wait any longer. If you don't come, I'm going to fetch you."

"Oh, just let me pray for my three dear brothers!"

However, he would not listen to her. Instead, he went upstairs and dragged her down. Then he grabbed her by the hair and was about to plunge the knife into her heart, when the three brothers knocked at

the door, charged inside, and tore their sister out of his hands. They then drew out their sabers and cut him down. Afterward he was hung up in the bloody chamber next to the women he had killed. Later, the brothers took their dear sister home with them, and all Bluebeard's treasures belonged to her.