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THE HISTORY
OF
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THE HISTORY

OF

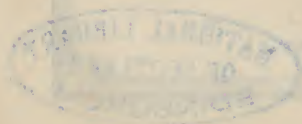
BLUE BEARD.



BY

WILLIAM BENTLEY, ESQ.

1822



BLUE BEARD.

Rich Blue Beard's life we here unfold,
His lots of jewels, stores of gold,—
His thirst for blood is held to view,
And secrets of the Chamber Blue.

A LONG time ago, and at a considerable distance from any town, there lived a gentleman, who was not only in possession of great riches, but of the largest estates in that part of the country. Although he had some very elegant neat mansions on his estates, yet he generally resided in a magnificent castle, beautifully situated on a rising ground, surrounded with groves of the finest evergreens, and other choice trees and shrubs.

The inside of this fine castle was even more beautiful than the outside; for the rooms were all hung with the richest damask, curiously ornamented; the chairs and sofas were covered with the finest velvet, fringed with gold; and all his table-dishes and plates were either of silver or gold, finished in the most elegant style. His carriages and horses might have served a king, and perhaps, were finer than any monarch's of the present day. The gentleman's appearance, however, did not altogether correspond with his wealth; for, to a fierce disagreeable countenance, was added an ugly blue beard, which made him an object of fear and disgust in the neighbourhood, where he usually went by the name of Blue Beard, that all the girls and women ran away from him.

Though the Turkish laws allow every man the liberty to have as many wives and concubines as he can support, yet Blue Beard never had more than one wife at a time; and it was not a little remarkable, that out of twelve young and beautiful damsels, to whom he had been married, not one lived more than a few months, and by far the major part were reported to be dead in only a few weeks after their marriage; and their funeral conducted in so private a manner, that none of their relations had any opportunity of examining their bodies, to discover whether their death was occasioned by ill usage. Suspicion was further heightened by the circumstances of their having died at one particular castle in the country. To this castle, which was situated far remote from other dwellings, he had always chose to conduct his wives a few

days after their marriage, and from whence they were never seen to return.

About three months after the death of his twelfth wife, the Bashaw, who had returned from his castle to the principal town in his dominions, passed by the house of an old lady and her two daughters, who were people of some rank, but by no means wealthy. The two young ladies were very pretty, and the fame of their beauty having reached Blue Beard, he determined to ask one of them in marriage. Having ordered a carriage, he called at their house, where he saw the two young ladies, and was very politely received by their mother, with whom he begged a few moments conversation, which he began by describing his immense riches, and then told her the purpose of his visit, begging she would use her interest in his favour. They were both so lovely, he said, that he would be happy to get either of them for his wife, and would therefore leave it to their own choice to determine upon the subject, and immediately took his leave.

When the proposals of Blue Beard were mentioned to the young ladies by their mother, both Miss Anne and her sister Fatima protested that they would never marry an ugly man, and particularly one with such a frightful beard; besides, although he possessed such immense riches, it was reported in the country, that he had married several beautiful ladies, and nobody could tell what had become of them.

The mother said, that the gentleman was agreeable in his conversation and manners; that the ugliness of his face, and the blue beard, were defects which they soon would be reconciled to from habit; that his immense riches would procure them every luxury that their heart could desire; and he was so civil, that she was certain the scandalous reports about his having so many wives, must be entirely without foundation.

The two young ladies, who were as civil as they possibly could, in order to conceal the disgust they felt at Blue Beard, and to soften their refusal, replied to this effect:—That, at present, they had no desire to change their situation; but, if they had, the one sister could never think of depriving the other of so good a match, and that they did not wish to be separated.

Blue Beard having called next day, the old lady told him what her daughters had said; on which he sighed deeply, and pretended to be very much disappointed; but, as he had the mother on his side, he still continued his visits to the family. Blue Beard, knowing the attractions that fine houses, fine furniture, and fine entertainments, have on the minds of ladies

in general, invited the mother, her two daughters, and two or three other ladies, who were then on a visit to them, to spend a day or two with him at his castle.

Blue Beard's invitation was accepted, and having spent a considerable time in arranging their wardrobe, and in adorning their persons, they all set out for the splendid mansion of Blue Beard. When they reached the castle, Blue Beard, attended by a number of his servants in splendid dresses, received them with the most polite courtesy, and conducted them to a magnificent drawing-room.

An elegant repast was ready in the dining-room, to which they adjourned. Here they were again astonished by the



grandeur of the apartment and the elegance of the entertainment; and they felt so very happy, that the evening passed away before any of them were aware of it.

Next day, after they had finished breakfast, the ladies proceeded to examine the pictures and furniture of the rooms that were open, and were truly astonished at the magnificence that everywhere met their view.

The party felt so agreeable amidst the scenes of festivity, that they continued at the castle for several days, during which the cunning Blue Beard by every obsequious service, tried to gain the favour of his fair guests. Personal attentions, even although paid us by an ugly creature, seldom fail to make a favourable impression, and therefore it was no wonder that Fatima, the youngest of the two sisters, began to think Blue Beard a very polite, pleasant, and civil gentleman, and that the beard, which she and her sister had been so much afraid of, was not so very blue.

A short time after her return home, Fatima, who was delighted with the attention which had been paid her at the

castle, told her mother that she did not now feel any objections to accept of Blue Beard as a husband. The old lady immediately communicated to him the change of her daughter's sentiments.

Blue Beard, who lost no time in paying the family a visit, was in a few days privately married to the young lady, and soon after the ceremony, Fatima, accompanied by her sister, returned to the castle, the wife of Blue Beard.

On arriving there, they were received at the entrance by all his retinue, attired in elegant dresses; and Blue Beard, after saluting his bride, led the way to an elegant entertainment, where, every thing that could add to their comfort being prepared, they spent the evening in the most agreeable manner.



The next day, and every succeeding day, Blue Beard always varied the amusements; and a month had passed away imperceptibly, when he told his wife that he was obliged to leave her for a few weeks, as he had some affairs to transact in a distant part of the country, which required his personal attendance.

"But," said he, "my dear Fatima, you may enjoy yourself during my absence in any way that will tend to your happiness; and you can invite your friends to make the time pass more agreeably, for you are sole mistress in this castle. Here 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 of my strong box, where I keep my money; and this belongs to the casket in which are all my jewels. Here also is a master key to all the rooms in the house; but this small key belongs to the blue closet at the end of the long gallery on the ground-floor. I give you leave," he

continued, "to open, or to do what you like with all the rest of the castle except this closet. Now, my dear, remember you must not enter it, nor even put the key into the lock. If you do not obey me in this, expect the most dreadful of punishments."

She promised implicit obedience to his orders, and then accompanied him to the gate, where Blue Beard, after saluting her in a tender manner, stepped into the coach, and drove away.



When Blue Beard was gone, Fatima sent a kind of invitation to her friends to come immediately to the castle, and ordered a grand entertainment to be prepared for their reception. She also sent a messenger to her two brothers, both officers in the army, who were quartered about forty miles distant, requesting they would obtain leave of absence, and spend a few days with her. So eager were her friends to see the fine apartments and the riches of Blue Beard's castle, of which they had heard so much, that in less than two hours after receiving the notice, the whole company were assembled, with the exception of her brothers, who were not expected till the following day.

As her guests arrived long before the time appointed for the entertainment, Fatima took them through every apartment in the castle, and displayed all the wealth she had acquired by her marriage with Blue Beard.

On being told that every thing was ready, Fatima conducted her guests to the dining-room, where they sat down to the most magnificent repast, served up in dishes and covers of the finest gold. Music and other amusements succeeded, and the night was far advanced before the company left the castle.

During the day, Fatima was so much engaged, that she

never once thought of the blue closet, which Blue Beard had given her such strict commands not to open; but when all the visitors were gone, and she had retired to her chamber, the restrictions that Blue Beard had put upon her not to examine the closet, raised her curiosity to know its contents to such a degree, as to be almost irresistible.

She took out the key, which was made of the finest gold, with several characters engraved on the handle; and after examining it carefully, she went to consult with her sister on the subject that engrossed her thoughts. Anne used every argument she could think of to persuade Fatima against the imprudence of her desires, in wishing to pry into what Blue



Beard had so strictly forbidden, and also reminded her of the threats he had used; but they were all in vain, for her remonstrances only served to raise Fatima's curiosity the higher, and she determined to gratify it, whatever the result might be.

From the lateness of the hour, she knew there was no danger of her being observed by any of the servants; therefore, in spite of all that her sister could do, she seized one of the candles, and hurried down stairs to the fatal closet. On reaching the door she stopped, and began to reason with herself on the propriety of her conduct; but her anxiety to know what the closet contained, and thinking, as Blue Beard was so very fond of her, that he would easily forgive her disobeying him, she, with a trembling hand, applied the key to the lock, and opened the door.

After unlocking the door, she remained a few moments undetermined whether to proceed or not, but her curiosity urged her forward; and as she observed nothing to intimidate her, she entered with some little degree of resolution. She

had only advanced a few steps, when the most frightful scene met her view: and, struck with horror and dismay, she dropped the key of the closet. She was in the midst of blood; and the heads, bodies, and the mutilated limbs of murdered ladies lay scattered on the floor. These ladies had all been married to Blue Beard, and had all suffered dreadful deaths for their imprudent curiosity.

Blue Beard's first wife was a bold spirited woman, with whom he quarrelled soon after marriage; and having in the heat of his anger murdered her, he concealed the body in this blue closet. The rest of his wives, who, like Fatima, could



not refrain from indulging their curiosity, he had killed for acting contrary to his express commands; and the key, which was the gift of a fairy, had always betrayed their fatal disobedience.

The terror of Fatima, whose blood was chilled within her, while her hair stood on end, was not diminished on discerning these dreadful words on the wall, in large characters—

“THE REWARD OF DISOBEDIENCE AND IMPRUDENT CURIOSITY!”

She trembled violently; but, on recovering a little, she summoned sufficient resolution to snatch up the key, and leave this abode of horror and dismay. Almost without knowing what she did, from the agitated state of her mind, she closed the door behind her, and locked it.

As she went up stairs, her imagination conjured up the ghosts of these murdered ladies to her view, and a faintness coming over her, she was obliged for a few moments to lean against the bannister, to regain strength enough to reach her sister's chamber, to whom she related the whole of the horrid

adventure. On her sister inquiring if she locked the door, Fatima produced the key, but it was all covered with blood, and they both turned pale with fear. They spent a great part of the night in trying to clean off the blood from the key, which was the only evidence of Fatima's imprudence; but it was without effect; for though they washed and scoured it with brick dust and sand, no sooner was the blood removed from one side than it appeared on the other. Fatigued with



their exertions, they at last retired to bed: but the wretched Fatima, who could not sleep, lay ruminating on the awful scene she had gone through, and devising means for escaping the vengeance of her cruel husband, Blue Beard.

Fatima rose at a late hour next day, and after breakfast, she consulted her sister how she ought to proceed. As Blue Beard was to be absent for some weeks, she thought of making her escape from the castle before his return; but as her brothers were expected in an hour or two, she resolved to tell them what had taken place, and be guided by their advice. A loud knock at the gate made her almost leap for joy, and she cried, "They are come! they are come!" but what was her consternation when Blue Beard hastily opened the door and entered! It was impossible for Fatima to conceal her agitation, while Blue Beard mentioned, without seeming to observe her uneasiness, that he had been met by a messenger, who was on the way to the castle to prevent his journey, and therefore his presence there would not now be necessary.

Fatima pretended to be very happy at his sudden return, and said every thing she could think of to please him; but Blue Beard, who guessed what she had been about, requested the keys, in order, as he said, that he might change his dress, She went to her chamber, and soon returned with the keys.

all except the one belonging to the blue closet, and put them into his hand. He took the keys from her with seeming indifference, and after glancing at them minutely, said, rather sternly, "How is this, Fatima? I do not see the key of the blue closet here! Go and bring it to me instantly."



The poor girl feeling the crisis of her fate approaching, said, "I will go and search for it," and left the apartment in tears. She went straight to her sister's chamber, where they again tried every means, but in vain, to remove the blood from the key. She continued a few moments agitated and irresolute, but the voice of Blue Beard calling for her, left no time for her consideration, and she was forced to return to the apartment where she had left her husband, and reluctantly gave him the fatal key.

On receiving the key, Blue Beard, after examining it, burst into a terrible rage, and said with great harshness,—

"Pray, madam, how came this blood here?"

"I am sure I do not know," replied poor Fatima, trembling and turning pale.

"What! do you not know?" cried Blue Beard, in a voice like thunder, which made poor Fatima start with fear; "but I know well! You have been in the forbidden blue closet! And since you are so fond of prying into secrets, you shall take up your abode with the ladies you saw in that closet. Now, madam, expect no mercy, as nothing can alter your fate. The punishment you shall receive is only the just reward of your disobedience and imprudent curiosity."

Almost expiring with terror, the trembling Fatima sunk upon her knees, and implored him in the most piteous manner to forgive her. While supplicating him to spare her life, she looked so mournfully in his face, that it would have melted

any heart which was not harder than stone. However, it had no effect on the cruel Blue Beard; for he drew his dreadful scimitar, and desired her to prepare for immediate death.

Blue Beard had raised his arm to perpetrate the horrible deed, when a dreadful shriek from her sister, who at that moment entered her apartment arrested his attention. Her sister entreated him to spare the life of Fatima, but he was deaf to her intercession, and the only favour that the relentless tyrant would grant to her entreaties, was a respite of a



quarter of an hour, that she might make her peace with heaven before he put her to death.

Blue Beard, after he had promised to allow this, in order to secure his victim during the short space allotted her for prayer, and that her screams or groans might not reach the domestics, led, or rather dragged her up to a large hall, in the top of the tower of the castle, to which they were followed by her sister. He then told her to make the best use of her time, as she might expect his return the moment it elapsed, and immediately left the place.

When alone with her sister, Fatima felt her dreadful situation, and again burst into tears. Only fifteen short minutes between her and the most cruel death, without the least chance of escape; for Blue Beard had secured the door when he retired, and the staircase they saw only led to the battlements. Fatima's thoughts were now turned to her brothers, whom she expected that day, and she requested her sister to ascend to the top of the tower, to see if there were any appearance of them, for on them her whole expectation of deliverance now rested; or, if she saw any person approaching, to beckon them to come to her assistance.

Fatima's sister immediately ascended to the top of the

battlements, where she stood to observe if any one approached the castle, while the poor trembling girl below, every minute, cried out, "Sister Anne, my dear sister Anne, do you see any person approaching yet?"

Her sister always replied, "There is not a human being in view, and I see nothing but the sun and the grass."

She was on her knees bewailing her fate, when Blue Beard,



in a tremendous voice cried out, "Are you ready? the time is expired;" and she heard the sound of his footsteps approaching.

She again supplicated him to spare her life, but he refused; and he was proceeding to seize her, when she entreated five minutes longer to finish her prayers. Blue Beard knowing she was completely in his power, and without the least chance of escape, granted her the five minutes she had requested, and then retired.

Fatima again renewed her inquiries to her sister; "Do you see no one coming yet?"

Her sister replied, "There is not a human being within sight."

When the five minutes were elapsed, the voice of Blue Beard was heard bawling out, "Are you ready yet?"

She again beseeched him to allow her only two minutes more, and then addressed her sister, "Dear sister Anne, do you see any one coming yet?"

"I see," said her sister, "a cloud of dust rising a little to the left."

In breathless agitation she again cried out, "Do you think it is my brothers?"

"Alas! no, my dearest Fatima," replied the sister, "it is only a flock of sheep."

Again the voice of Blue Beard was heard and she begged for one minute longer. She then called out for the last time, "Sister Anne, do you see no one coming yet?"

Her sister quickly answered, "I see two men on horseback, but they are still a great way off."

The hope of deliverance made Fatima exclaim, in the ecstasy of the moment, "Thank Heaven! thank Heaven! I shall yet be saved, for it must be my two brothers!—my dear



sister, make every signal in your power to hasten them forward, or they will be too late to prevent my fate."

Blue Beard's patience being exhausted, he burst open the door in a rage, and made a blow with his scimitar at the wretched Fatima, with the intention of striking off her head; but she sprang close to him and evaded it. Furious at being foiled in his aim, he threw her from him, and then seizing her by the hair of the head, was in the act of striking her a blow with his scimitar, which would have terminated her existence, when the noise of persons approaching, with hasty steps, arrested the progress of his sanguinary arm. Blue Beard had not time to conjecture who the intruders might be, when the door opened, and two officers with their swords drawn, rushed into the apartment.

Struck with terror, the wretch released his wife from his grasp, and without attempting to resist, he endeavoured to effect his escape from the resentment of her brothers; but they pursued, and seized him before he had got above twenty paces from the place. After reproaching Blue Beard with his cruelty, they dragged him back to the spot where he intended to have murdered their sister; and there, stabbing him to the heart with their swords, he expired uttering the most horrid oaths and imprecations.

Fatima, who had fallen to the ground at the time Blue Beard quitted the hold of her, still lay in the same situation insensible; for the appearance of her brothers at the moment she expected certain death, had thrown her into a faint, which continued during the whole of the time they were engaged in despatching her husband.



The two young officers now turned their attention to their sister, whom they raised from the ground, but she could hardly be persuaded of her safety, till they pointed to where Blue Beard lay extended lifeless.

Fatima, on recovering a little, tenderly embraced her deliverers: and the appearance of their sister Anne, who had come down from the top of the battlements, added to their happiness.

All those horrid murders which had been committed by Blue Beard, were unknown to his domestics, on whose credulity he imposed by falsehoods, which they had no means of detecting: Fatima and her brothers thought the most

prudent way to act, was to assemble them together, and then disclose the wickedness of their late master.

It was now that each of the domestics could recall to their memory the bitter sigh and heavy groan that had struck upon their ears, shortly before the wives of Blue Beard disappeared; yet the artful, and seemingly meek behaviour of their master, contrived to lull all suspicion of the atrocious fiend. It was with some difficulty they made themselves believe that they had been serving this demon in human form.

By the directions of Fatima, her two brothers conducted all the servants to the dreadful scene of her husband's cruelties; and then showing them his dead body, related the whole occurrences which had taken place. They all said that his punishment was not adequate to what he deserved, and begged that they might be continued in the service of their mistress. As Blue Beard had no relations, Fatima was sole heir to the whole of his immense property; and mistress of the castle; in the possession of which she was confirmed by the laws of the country.

Immediately after the interment of the dead bodies, the company retired to Blue Beard's private chamber, and on examining his papers discovered a sealed packet, which, on being opened, contained a sheet of parchment, on which was written the names of his murdered wives, with the addresses of their nearest relatives, and at Fatima's request, her brothers, with as much delicacy and feeling as the distressing and mournful tidings would call forth, wrote to them a full explanation of Blue Beard's conduct, and a detailed account of the circumstances which led to the tragic termination of this infamous character.

Soon after this, Fatima gave a magnificent entertainment to all her friends, where happiness was seen in every face; and on this occasion the poor, who were assembled for many miles round, partook most liberally of her bounty. Though possessed of riches almost inexhaustible, Fatima disposed of them with so much discretion, that she gained the esteem of all who knew her. She bestowed handsome fortunes on her two brothers, who were the means of saving her life; and to her sister who was married about twelve months after, she gave a very large dowry.

The beauty, riches, and amiable conduct of Fatima, attracted a number of admirers; and among others, a young nobleman of very high rank, who to a handsome person, added every quality calculated to make a good husband; and after a reasonable time spent in courtship, their marriage was celebrated with great rejoicings.

THE WHITE CAT.

AN account has long been preserved of a king who had three sons. These young men were all handsome in their forms, interesting in their countenances, noble and generous in their dispositions, and amiable and beneficent in their conduct.

That he might pass the remainder of his days in tranquillity, he determined to employ the princes in such a manner as at once to give each of them the hope of succeeding to the crown.

He sent for them to his closet, and after having kindly conversed with them, he said, "You must be sensible, my dear children, that my advanced age prevents me from attending as closely as I formerly did to the affairs of state. I fear this may be injurious to my subjects; and I therefore desire to place my crown on the head of one of you.

"It is at least just that you should endeavour, in return for my intention, to give me some proof of your diligence, in fulfilling any desire I may entertain, particularly if it can contribute to the amusement of my old age. I cannot help thinking that a little dog, particularly handsome and faithful, would, of all things, afford me the greatest entertainment. Without, therefore, bestowing a voluntary preference on any one of you, I declare, that he who procures for me the most curious and interesting little dog, shall be my successor."

Each took a different road: we shall record the adventures of the youngest, the most accomplished prince of the age.

Not a day passed, in which he did not purchase all the handsome dogs that he could meet with.

At length, wandering he knew not whither, he found himself in a forest. Night suddenly came on, and with it a violent storm of thunder, lightning, and rain. To add to his perplexity he lost his way. After he had wandered about for a long time, he perceived a light, which induced him to believe that he was not far from some house. He pursued his way toward it, and in a short time found himself at the gates of the most magnificent palace he had ever beheld.

The prince was so astonished that he dared not move a step; but presently he felt himself pushed gently on by some other hands from behind him. He walked on in great perplexity, till he entered a vestibule inlaid with porphyry and jasper: at this instant he heard a voice chant the following words:—

“ Welcome prince, no danger fear,
 Love and bliss attend you here ;
 You shall break a magic spell,
 That on a beauteous lady fell.

Welcome prince, no danger fear,
 Love and bliss attend you here.”

When he had passed through an immense suit of apartments, all equally superb, he was stopped by the hands, and a large easy chair rolled of itself towards the fire place. A fire appeared to kindle and burn of itself; and the hands, which he observed were extremely white and delicate, took off his wet clothes, and supplied their place with the finest linen imaginable: over these was placed a wrapping-gown, embroidered with the brightest gold, and enriched with pearls.

There was in it a table spread for a repast; every article for use was of burnished gold, adorned with jewels

The prince observed that there were two covers set, and was wondering who would be his companion, when his attention was attracted to a small figure not a foot high, which just then entered the room, and advanced toward him.

The prince was at a loss what to think. The little figure now approached, and throwing aside her veil, he beheld a most beautiful white cat; she seemed young and melancholy, and addressing herself to the prince (for she had a human voice,) she said, “Prince, you are welcome; your presence affords me great pleasure.”

“Madam,” replied the prince, “I would fain thank you for your generosity; but you will pardon me for expressing the astonishment I feel, that under your present form you should possess the gift of human speech, and the magnificent palace I see.”

When supper was over, the prince perceived that the white cat had a miniature portrait set in gold, suspended to one of her feet. He begged her permission to look at it, and to his astonishment, found that it was the portrait of a young man exactly like himself.

When the night was far advanced, the white cat wished him good-night, and he was conducted by the hands to a bed-chamber which differed from all the apartments he had yet seen in the palace, being hung with the wings of butterflies, mingled with the most curious feathers.

The prince was undressed and put into bed by the hands, but not a word was spoken, and in the morning was awakened by a confused noise.

He looked into the court-yard, and perceived more than five hundred cats busily employed in preparing for the field, for this was a day of festival.

The time of the prince passed so delightfully that he had almost forgotten that he had yet to procure a little dog for the king his father.

"Alas!" said he to the white cat, "how it will afflict me to leave you! Either make yourself a lady, or let me become a cat. She smiled at the prince's wish, but made him no reply.

At length the twelvemonths were nearly expired. The white cat, who knew the very day on which the prince was to reach his father's palace, reminded him that he had but three days longer to look for a perfect little dog.

The prince began to lament how he had so neglected his duty. But the white cat told him not to afflict himself, since she would not only provide him with a little dog, but also with a horse, which should safely convey him in less than twelve hours.

"Look at this," said she, showing him an acorn, "this contains what you desire."

The young prince arrived first at the place which had been agreed upon by him and his two brothers: they followed soon afterwards.

The next morning they went together to the royal palace. The dogs of the two elder princes were lying on cushions, and were carefully wrapped in embroidered quilts, that the greatest care might be taken of them.

The king having examined the two little dogs of the elder princes, declared he thought they were so equally beautiful that he knew not to which he could with justice give the preference. They accordingly began to dispute, when the youngest prince taking the acorn from his pocket, soon terminated their contentions: for a little dog appeared which could with ease go through the ring of a lady's finger, and was, moreover, a miracle of beauty.

The king could not possibly hesitate in declaring his satisfaction with them all; though he was obliged to own the superiority of the youngest prince's offering.

He begged, however, that they would take another year to procure him a piece of linen, so exquisitely fine, that it might be drawn through a small ring.

The youngest son remounted his horse and soon arrived at the palace of his favourite white cat, who received him with extreme joy.

"Make yourself perfectly easy, dear prince," she said "I have in my palace some cats that are extremely ingenious in manufacturing such linen, as the king requires.

The second period soon glided away, but the white cat took care to remind him of his duty in proper time.

She then presented him with a nut. "You will find in it"

said she, "the piece of fine linen I promised you; do not break the shell until you are in the presence of the king your father."

The princes hastened to present to the king the curious presents he had required them to procure.

The eldest produced a piece of linen so exquisitely fine, that his friends had no doubt but that it would pass through the small ring.

The ring, which had been preserved ever since by the royal treasurer, was now produced; but although almost every person thought that the eldest prince would succeed, yet when the king tried to draw it through the ring, it would not pass.

The second prince now advanced, who made as sure of obtaining the crown as his elder brother had done. But, alas! with no better success; for, though his piece of linen was extremely fine, yet it could not be drawn through so small a ring.

It was now the youngest prince's turn, who accordingly came forward, and opening an elegant little box inlaid with jewels, he took out a nut.

He cracked the shell, expecting that he should immediately perceive his piece of linen. But what was his astonishment to perceive only a smaller nut! The prince cracked this, which was filled with a kernel. He divided the kernel, and found in the middle of it a grain of wheat. He opened the grain of wheat, and discovered a millet-seed. And having opened the grain of millet-seed, to the astonishment of all who were present, he drew from it a piece of linen, four hundred yards long, and fine enough not only to be drawn through the ring, but even through the eye of the smallest needle.

"My sons," said he, "it is so gratifying to the heart of a father, to receive proofs of his children's love and obedience, that I cannot deny myself the satisfaction of requiring one effort more.

"I must request you to undertake another expedition; and whichever, by the end of a year, shall bring me the most beautiful lady, shall marry her, and receive my crown."

The youngest prince, within twelve hours, again arrived at the palace of his dear white cat.

Every kind of entertainment occupied the time, as it had done before.

At last only one day remained of the third year!

The white cat then addressed him: "To-morrow, my prince, you must present yourself at the palace of your father, and give him the remaining proof of your obedience.

"It depends on yourself alone, whether you succeed this

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time; for the time is come in which the enchantment I suffer may be terminated; and I have some hopes that my appearance would not be much inferior to that of the ladies who may be presented by your brothers.

"You must, however," said she, "cut off my head and tail, and throw them into the fire."

"I!" said the prince, with horror, "I cut off your head and tail! you surely mean to try my gratitude and regard, which, believe me, will never be wanting."

The prince could not restrain his tears; yet he considered himself bound to execute the dreadful task. The white cat continued to press him so earnestly to perform this service for her, that with a reluctant hand he drew his sword, cut off her head and tail, and threw them into the fire. Immediately after he had done this, the most beautiful lady his eyes had ever seen stood before him; and he had not recovered sufficiently from his surprise to speak to her, when a long train of attendants, who had recovered their proper forms at the same instant with their mistress, came to offer their humble congratulations. She received them with great kindness, and when they had retired, she thus addressed the astonished prince:—

"Do not imagine, my dear prince, that I have always been a cat, or that my parentage is obscure. My father was a monarch of six kingdoms; he loved my mother with extreme affection, leaving her always at the discretion of her own inclination. Her prevailing amusement was that of travelling; and a short time before I was born, having heard that some fairies were in possession of the most delicious fruits, she had so strong a desire to see these gardens, and to taste the fruit, that she immediately set out for the distant country in which they were to be found. She arrived at the abode of the fairies, which she found to be a magnificent palace glittering on every side with gold and jewels. She knocked at the gate some time, but no one came; nor could she perceive the least sign of any inhabitants. These circumstances only increased her desire. She saw the tops of the trees above the garden walls, and could perceive the tempting fruit with which they were loaded. The queen, unable to return home without the gratification she desired, ordered her attendants to place tents near the gate of the palace, as she was determined to watch for an opportunity of speaking to the persons who might pass in or out. One night, as she lay half asleep, she turned about, and opening her eyes, perceived a little old woman of ugly and deformed appearance, seated in the chair by her bed side.

“‘I, and my sister fairies,’ said this woman, ‘think it very indiscreet in your majesty so obstinately to persist in wishing for our fruit; but, since your valuable life is endangered, we consent to allow you as much as you can carry away, provided you, in return, shall give us what we ask.’

“‘Ah! kind fairy,’ said the queen, ‘I will grant you any thing I can bestow, even my kingdoms, on condition that I may eat of your fruit.’

“The old fairy then informed my mother, that they would require the first child she should have, as soon as it was born. She added, however, that the utmost care should be taken of it, and that it should be eminently accomplished. The queen replied, that severe as the condition was, she must submit, as nothing but the fruit would save her life.

“In short, my prince,” continued the young lady; “my mother arose, was dressed, instantly set off to the palace of the fairies, and satisfied her longing. She then returned to the king my father, but said not a word of the promise she had made to give her first child to the fairies. This reflection, however, afterwards made her very melancholy, till, at length, being urged by the king to disclose the cause of her depression, she confessed the truth.

“As soon as I was born, he had me conveyed to a tower in the palace, to which there were twenty flights of stairs, each having a door; but my father kept the key of them all, so that no one came near me without his knowledge. When the fairies understood what had been done, they first sent to demand me, and on my father’s refusal, they let loose in his dominions a large and dreadful dragon. This enormous reptile destroyed men, women and children; and even the vegetation of every kind began to die throughout the kingdom. The king’s distress was increased by all this devastation; and finding that in a short time his whole empire would be annihilated, he consented to resign me. The fairies placed me in a turret of the palace elegantly furnished, but it had no door; so that access to me could only be obtained through the windows. I had, however the liberty to go out into a delightful garden. One day, however, as I was talking to my birds, I perceived a young gentleman who was listening to me. As I had never before seen any person but the fairies, I thought him very pleasing. He looked at me, and bowed with respect, but seemed afraid to speak, as he knew I was in the palace of fairies. He ventured to speak to me, and informed me that he thought me extremely beautiful; and said a great deal about the happiness my society would give him for life. I resolved to find some means

of escaping, and was not long in contriving a probable scheme for the execution of my plan. I requested the fairies to allow me a netting-needle, a mesh, and some cord, that I might make some nets, and amuse myself with catching birds at my window. This request they readily complied with; and in a short time I completed a ladder long enough to reach the ground. When the young gentleman next came under my window I told him what I had done, and invited him to come into my room, to which he rapturously consented. I then let down the ladder, which he mounted, and quickly entered my turret. Whilst we were talking, one of the fairies, mounted on a dragon, rushed in at the window of my room. One of them then touched me with a wand, and I instantly became a white cat. The same fairy then informed me of the death of my parents; and pronounced upon me as a sentence, 'that I should not be restored to my natural form until a young prince, the exact resemblance of him whom I had already seen and lost, should cut off my head and tail, and cast them into a fire. You, my prince, are that exact resemblance, and you have dissolved the enchantment.'

The prince and princess set out together, in a car of extraordinary splendour and reached their destination just as the two brothers had arrived, each with a beautiful lady.

The king having heard that all his sons had succeeded in finding and obtaining what he had exacted, again began to think of some fresh expedient to procrastinate the surrender of his crown. The elder princes felt indignant that such beautiful and interesting ladies as had consented to accompany them should be subjected to such unmerited disappointment. The youngest prince was so enraptured with his princess, that he scarcely thought about the competition. At that instant the princess advanced, and addressed the old monarch.

"I lament that your majesty, who is so capable of governing, should have thought of resigning the crown. I am so fortunate as to have six kingdoms included in my empire. Permit me to bestow one on each of the elder princes, and to enjoy the remaining four with your youngest son. And may it please your majesty to keep your own kingdom, and make no decision concerning the beauty of the princesses before you, each of whom will live happily with her respective prince."

The loud acclamations that reached the ear of the young prince awakened him, for the morning was far advanced; and his servant was calling him out of bed, where he had only been dreaming, the first night after he had set out on his travels.

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