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A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

THE GREAT FAIRY TALE TRADITION: FROM STRAPAROLA AND BASILE TO THE BROTHERS GRIMM



TEXTS

CRITICISM

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Indeed, the prince entered her room with a nest of sparrows in his hat. "Imagine that!" he said. "I've just left my teacher in a great fit of anger because I had been emptying out this nest instead of doing my lesson with him."

"But your teacher is right to be angry with you," Astre told him. "Isn't it shameful for a young man of your age not to be able to read?"

"Oh, you bore me just as much as he does," Charmant responded. "I've got other things to do than to occupy myself with all that learning. I prefer a paddle or a ball than all the books in the world. Good-bye. I'm going to play some shuttlecock and battledore."¹

"And am I supposed to become the wife of this man when he is so dumb?" Astre asked. "I assure you, my good woman, that I would rather die than to marry him. What a difference there is between him and the prince whom I recently met. It's true that he is very ugly, but when I recall his conversation, it seems to me that he is no longer so horrible. Why isn't he as good-looking as Charmant? But when all is said and done, what's the use of good looks? A sickness can ruin them. Old age causes good looks to fade for sure. What happens then to those who do not have minds? In truth, my dear woman, if I had to choose, I would prefer that prince despite his ugliness over the stupid man they are making me marry."

"I am very pleased to see you think in such a reasonable manner," Diamantine said.

As soon as midnight sounded, the good fairy proposed to the princess to descend into the garden, where they went and sat down on a bench. Soon Spirituel joined them, and he was overjoyed when he heard Astre speak. Indeed, he was convinced that he had given her as much intelligence as he himself had. On her side, Astre was enchanted by the prince's conversation. But when Diamantine informed her about how much she was obliged to Spirituel for her ability to think, her gratitude made her forget his ugliness even though she saw it perfectly well, for it was as clear as the moon.

"I am greatly obliged to you!" she told him. "How may I repay you?"

"It's easy to do," the fairy responded. "You can become Spirituel's wife. It only depends on you to give him just as much beauty as he has given you intelligence."

"I would be very angry to do this," Astre responded. "Spirituel pleases me exactly as he is. I don't care whether he is handsome. He is amiable, and that's enough for me."

"I am going to transport you to Spirituel's realm," the fairy said. "His brother is dead, and the hate that Furie had inspired in the people against him no longer exists."

In fact, the people were happy to see Spirituel return, and he only had to spend three months in his kingdom for the people to accustom themselves to his looks. But they never ceased to admire his intelligence.

1. A game similar to badminton. A shuttlecock was a cork stuck with feathers and batted with a paddle called a battledore.

Bloodthirsty Husbands

Many historians and literary critics have endeavored to identify Bluebeard as a real person and have associated him with a man named Gilles de Rais, a bloodthirsty murderer of the seventeenth century. However, the facts of Gilles de Rais's life and the stories told about him do not really correspond to the character and events in Perrault's tale. If anything, Perrault borrowed numerous motifs from the oral folktale tradition to form his original tale: the marriage with a repulsive figure, the curiosity of the woman (Pandora's box), the bloody key as a sign of disobedience, and the delay of the execution. Similar to his version of "Little Red Riding Hood," Perrault's tale of "Bluebeard" places the blame of near violence on the wife's curiosity. It is symbolically implied through the stained key that, if she had not been curious, Bluebeard might not have tried to murder her. In contrast, the French and German folktale variants in the oral tradition that led to the production of the Grimms' "Fitcher's Bird" and "The Robber Bridegroom" depict a more active heroine, who is capable of saving her own life as well as her sisters. These oral tales predated Perrault's literary "Bluebeard" and were known in France and Germany. Quite often they involve a young woman who is obliged to marry a horrible-looking man, or she becomes engaged to him, and she becomes suspicious of his strange behavior. When she finds herself in difficulty, she often uses talking birds or dogs to carry messages that will save her. Sometimes she uses disguises or other ruses to outwit a murderous bridegroom, and the key symbol is not a key but an egg. Not only did the Grimms know Perrault's "Bluebeard" and various oral versions, but they were familiar with Ludwig Tieck's play *Ritter Blaubart* (*The Knight Bluebeard*, 1797). By the time the Grimms published their first edition of *Children's and Household Tales*, the two strands of the tales, the curious maiden in "Bluebeard" and the active, courageous heroine in "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Fitcher's Bird," had been woven into many different oral and literary versions in the nineteenth century. Ludwig Bechstein published two in his *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (1857), and the literary adaptations in France led to Anatole France's witty adaptation, "Les sept femmes de la Barbe-Bleue d'après des documents authentiques" ("The Seven Wives of Bluebeard according to Authentic Documents," 1909), in which Bluebeard is depicted as the unwitting victim of avaricious and adulterous wives, and to Béla Bartók's famous opera, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (1911).

JACOB AND WILHELM GRIMM

Bluebeard†

There was once 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 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 certainly would have passed over all the other rooms if she could have only 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

† Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Bluebeard"—"Blaubart" (1812), was published in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1815). It was omitted in 1819 because of its French origins.

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 that 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 eyes, 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 loudly 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 thunder and lightning. 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 only see 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.

JACOB AND WILHELM GRIMM

The Robber Bridegroom†

Once upon a time there was a miller who had a beautiful daughter, and when she was grown-up, he wanted to arrange a good marriage for her with a man who would provide for her in an appropriate way. "If the right suitor comes along and asks to marry her," he thought, "I shall give her to him."

It was not long before a suitor appeared who seemed to be very rich, and since the miller found nothing wrong with him, he promised him that he could wed his daughter. The maiden, however, did not love him the way a bride-to-be should love her bridegroom, nor did she trust him. Whenever she looked at him or thought about him, her heart shuddered with dread.

One day he said to her, "You're my bride-to-be, and yet you've never visited me."

"I don't know where your house is," the maiden replied.

"My house is out in the dark forest," said the bridegroom.

She tried to make excuses and told him she would not be able to find the way. But the bridegroom said, "Next Sunday I want you to come out and visit me. I've invited the guests, and I shall spread ashes on the ground so you can find the way."

When Sunday arrived and the maiden was supposed to set out on her way, she became very anxious but could not explain to herself why she felt so. She filled both her pockets with peas and lentils to mark the path. At the entrance to the forest, she found that the ashes had been spread, and she followed them, while throwing peas right and left on the ground with each step that she took. She walked nearly the whole day until she came to the middle of the forest. There she saw a solitary house, but she did not like the look of it because it was so dark and dreary. She went inside and found nobody at home. The place was deadly silent. Then suddenly a voice cried out:

† Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "The Robber Bridegroom"—"Der Räuberbräutigam" (1857), No. 40 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1857).

"Turn back, turn back, young bride.
The den belongs to murderers,
Who'll soon be at your side!"

The maiden looked up and saw that the voice came from a bird in a cage hanging on the wall. Once again it cried out:

"Turn back, turn back, young bride.
The den belongs to murderers,
Who'll soon be at your side!"

The beautiful bride moved from one room to the next and explored the entire house, but it was completely empty. Not a soul could be found. Finally, she went down into the cellar, where she encountered a very, very old woman, whose head was constantly bobbing.

"Could you tell me whether my bridegroom lives here?" asked the bride.

"Oh, you poor child," the old woman answered. "Do you realize where you are? This is a murderers' den! You may think you're about to celebrate your wedding, but the only marriage you'll celebrate will be with death. Just look! They ordered me to put this big kettle of water on the fire to boil. When they have you in their power, they'll chop you to pieces without mercy. Then they'll cook you and eat you because they're cannibals. If I don't take pity on you and save you, you'll be lost forever."

The old woman then led her behind a large barrel, where nobody could see her.

"Be still as a mouse," she said. "Don't budge or move! Otherwise, it will be all over for you. Tonight when the robbers are asleep, we'll escape. I've been waiting a long time for this chance."

No sooner was the maiden hidden than the godless crew came home, dragging another maiden with them. They were drunk and paid no attention to her screams and pleas. They gave her wine to drink, three full glasses, one white, one red, and one yellow, and soon her heart burst in two. Then they tore off her fine clothes, put her on a table, chopped her beautiful body to pieces, and sprinkled the pieces with salt. Behind the barrel, the poor bride shook and trembled, for she now realized what kind of fate the robbers had been planning for her. One of them noticed a ring on the murdered maiden's little finger, and since he could not slip it off easily, he took a hatchet and chopped the finger off. But the finger sprang into the air and over the barrel and fell right into the bride's lap. The robber took a candle and went looking for it, but he could not find it. Then another robber said, "Have you looked behind the barrel as well?"

Immediately the old woman called out, "Come and eat! You can look for it tomorrow. The finger's not going to run away from you."

"The old woman's right," the robbers said, and they stopped looking and sat down to eat. The old woman put a sleeping potion into their wine, and soon they lay down in the cellar, fell asleep, and began snoring. When the bride heard that, she came out from behind the barrel and had to step over the sleeping bodies lying in rows on the ground. She feared she might wake them up, but she got safely through with the help of God. The old woman went upstairs with her and opened the door, and the two of them

scampered out of the murderers' den as fast as they could. The wind had blown away the ashes, but the peas and lentils had sprouted and unfurled, pointing the way in the moonlight. They walked the whole night, and by morning they had reached the mill. Then the maiden told her father everything that had happened.

When the day of the wedding celebration came, the bridegroom appeared, as did all the relatives and friends that the miller had invited. As they were all sitting at the table, each person was asked to tell a story. The bride, though, remained still and did not utter a word. Finally, the bridegroom said, "Well, my dear, can't you think of anything? Tell us a good story."

"All right," she said. "I'll tell you a dream. I was walking alone through the forest and finally came to a house. There wasn't a soul to be found in the place except for a bird in a cage on the wall that cried out:

"Turn back, turn back, young bride.
The den belongs to murderers,
Who'll soon be at your side!"

"Then the bird repeated the warning.

(My dear, it was only a dream.)

"After that I went through all the rooms, and they were empty, but there was something about them that gave me an eerie feeling. Finally, I went downstairs into the cellar, where I found a very, very old woman, who was bobbing her head. I asked her, 'Does my bridegroom live in this house?' 'Oh, you poor child,' she responded, 'you've stumbled on a murderers' den. Your bridegroom lives here, but he wants to chop you up and kill you, and then he wants to cook you and eat you.'

(My dear, it was only a dream.)

"The old woman hid me behind a large barrel, and no sooner was I hidden than the robbers returned home, dragging a maiden with them. They gave her all sorts of wine to drink, white, red, and yellow, and her heart burst in two.

(My dear, it was only a dream.)

"One of the robbers saw that a gold ring was still on her finger, and since he had trouble pulling it off, he took a hatchet and chopped it off. The finger sprang into the air, over the barrel, and right into my lap. And here's the finger with the ring!"

With these words she produced the finger and showed it to all those present.

The robber, who had turned white as a ghost while hearing her story, jumped up and attempted to flee. However, the guests seized him and turned him over to the magistrate. Then he and his whole band were executed for their shameful crimes.

JACOB AND WILHELM GRIMM

Fitcher's Bird†

Once upon a time there was a sorcerer who used to assume the guise of a poor man and go begging from house to house to catch beautiful girls. No one knew where he took them since none of the girls ever returned.

One day he appeared at the door of a man who had three beautiful daughters. He looked like a poor, weak beggar and carried a basket on his back as though to collect handouts in it. He begged for some food, and when the oldest daughter came out to hand him a piece of bread, he had only to touch her, and that compelled her to jump into his basket. Then he rushed away with great strides and carried her to his house in the middle of a dark forest. Everything was splendid inside the house, and he gave her whatever she desired.

"My darling," he said, "I'm sure you'll like it here, for there's everything your heart desires."

After a few days had gone by, he said, "I must go on a journey and leave you alone for a short time. Here are the keys to the house. You may go wherever you want and look at everything except one room, which this small key here opens. If you disobey me, you will be punished by death." He also gave her an egg and said, "I'm giving you this egg for safekeeping. You're to carry it wherever you go. If you lose it, then something awful will happen."

She took the keys and the egg and promised to take care of everything. When he was gone, she went all around the house and explored it from top to bottom. The rooms glistened with silver and gold, and she was convinced that she had never seen such great splendor. Finally, she came to the forbidden door. She wanted to walk past it, but curiosity got the better of her. She examined the key, which looked like all the others, stuck it into the lock, turned it a little, and the door sprang open. But what did she see when she entered? There was a large bloody basin in the middle of the room, and it was filled with dead people who had been chopped to pieces. Next to the basin was a block of wood with a glistening ax on top of it. She was so horrified by this that she dropped the egg she had been holding in her hand, and it plopped into the basin. She took it out and wiped the blood off, but to no avail: the blood reappeared instantly. She wiped and scraped, but she could not get rid of the spot.

Not long after this, the sorcerer came back from his journey, and the first things he demanded from her were the keys and the egg. When she handed them to him, she was trembling, and he perceived right away by the red spots on the egg that she had been in the bloody chamber.

"Since you went into that chamber against my will," he said, "you will go back in, against your will. This is the end of your life."

† Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Fitcher's Bird"—"Fitchers Vogel" (1857), No. 46 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1857).

He threw her down, dragged her along by her hair, cut off her head on the block, and chopped her into pieces so that her blood flowed on the floor. Then he tossed her into the basin with the others.

"Now I shall fetch the second daughter," said the sorcerer.

Once again he went to the house in the guise of a poor man and begged. When the second daughter brought him a piece of bread, he caught her as he had the first, just by touching her. Then he carried her away, and she fared no better than her sister, for she succumbed to her own curiosity. She opened the door to the bloody chamber, looked inside, and had to pay for this with her life when the sorcerer returned from his journey.

Now he went and fetched the third daughter, but she was smart and cunning. After he had given her the keys and the egg and had departed, she put the egg away in a safe place. Then she explored the house and eventually came to the forbidden chamber. But, oh, what did she see? Her two dear sisters lay there in the basin cruelly murdered and chopped to pieces. However, she set to work right away, gathered the pieces together, and arranged them in their proper order: head, body, arms, and legs. When nothing more was missing, the pieces began to move and join together. Both the maidens opened their eyes and were alive again. Then they all rejoiced, kissed, and hugged each other.

When the sorcerer returned, he demanded his keys and egg right away, and when he could not discover the least trace of blood, he said, "You've passed the test, and you shall be my bride."

But he no longer had any power over her and had to do what she requested.

"All right," she answered. "But first I want you to carry a basket full of gold to my father and mother, and you're to carry it on your back by yourself. In the meantime I shall prepare for the wedding."

Then she ran to her sisters, whom she had hidden in a little chamber.

"The time has come when I can save you," she said. "The villain himself will carry you back home. But as soon as you get there, you must send me help."

She put her two sisters into a basket and covered them completely with gold until nothing could be seen of them at all. Then she called the sorcerer to her and said, "Now take the basket away. But don't you dare stop and rest along the way! I'll be keeping an eye on you from my window."

The sorcerer lifted the basket onto his back and went on his way. The basket, however, was so heavy that sweat ran down his face. At one point he sat down and wanted to rest a while, but one of the sisters called from the basket, "I can see through my window that you're resting. Get a move on at once!"

Whenever he stopped along the way, he heard a voice and had to keep moving. Although he had run out of breath and was groaning, he finally managed to bring the basket with the gold and the two maidens to their parents' house.

Back at his place, the bride was preparing the wedding feast and sent invitations to all the sorcerer's friends. Then she took a skull with grinning teeth, decorated it with jewels and a wreath of flowers, carried it up to the

attic window, and set it down so it faced outward. When everything was ready, she dipped herself into a barrel of honey, cut open a bed, and rolled around in the feathers so she looked like a strange bird, and it was impossible to recognize her. Afterward she went out of the house, and on the way she met some of the wedding guests, who asked:

"Where are you coming from, oh, Fitcher's bird?"

"From Fitze Fitcher's house, haven't you heard?"

"And what may the young bride be doing there?"

"She's swept the whole house from top to bottom.

Just now she's looking out the attic window."

Finally, she met the bridegroom, who was walking back slowly. He also asked:

"Where are you coming from, oh, Fitcher's bird?"

"From Fitze Fitcher's house, haven't you heard?"

"And what may the young bride be doing there?"

"She's swept the whole house from top to bottom.

Just now she's looking out the attic window."

The bridegroom looked up and saw the decorated skull. He thought it was his bride and nodded and greeted her in a friendly way. However, once he and his guests were all gathered inside the house, the bride's brother and relatives arrived. They had been sent to rescue her, and they locked all the doors of the house to prevent anyone from escaping. Then they set fire to the house, and the sorcerer and all his cronies were burned to death.