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Translated by ALFRED SUTRO and  
A. TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

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# Sister Beatrice and Ardiane & Barbe Bleue

Two Plays ❧ ❧ *Translated into  
English Verse from the Manu-  
script of Maurice Maeterlinck*  
By Bernard Miall ❧ ❧ ❧ ❧

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

### I

“THESE two little plays,” says the author, “are really librettos. Music is being written to them by M. Gilkas.” The French version is in unrhymed alexandrines, if the term be permissible; that is, in unrhymed lines of twelve syllables. It is of course possible to employ this metre in English verse, but it is a medium as yet too little polished by use to refract, without theft or distortion, its immanent sense; it is, so to speak, one of your material metres, more ready to present itself in body than in spirit, being still in a primitive stage of evolution, and waiting the master-hand which shall teach it an easy

## Translator's Preface

delivery and self-effacement. In short, it is a metre neither so far familiar nor so far developed as to justify its use by a translator, whose duty is to interpret his author, in some remote degree, as his author might wish, rather than to experiment as himself might please.

For myself, I had no envy to attempt it, and so, with my author's approval, I have turned his play into such blank verse as I might; holding, with him, that our English unrhymed verse of ten syllables, iambic in scheme,—trochaic, dactylic, anapæstic, catalectic, and what not by incident,—is an equivalent sufficiently near, and perhaps the most proper, of the French unrhymed verse of twelve syllables. But I do not pretend that the author's mood may not be betrayed by the staccato effect of the shorter line. To the French alexandrine, of all metres, is possible at times a



## Translator's Preface

“linkéd sweetness long drawn out,” which by a shorter metre, or, indeed, by any metre consisting, as ours, very largely of accent, is rarely attainable.

Readers may miss in “Sister Beatrice” what they are used to call the glamour the atmosphere, of the Maeterlinckian drama. They will miss it partly, no doubt, because I have translated it; but partly also because it is partly absent in the French; they may, perhaps, find more of it in the music, if they have the fortune to hear it. But the play unsung, unstaged,—it is, as I have said, a libretto—is the play of M. Maeterlinck’s which most nearly approaches, in the matter of treatment, the avowedly obvious spirit of the English drama. That the story is all spiritual, or rather, that the spiritual in the play has a story, is no doubt the reason why the treatment may be material and articulate.

## Translator's Preface

Other plays of this author might be described—he himself, I think, might so describe them—as belonging to static or potential drama: the plays were the dramas of a state of feeling. Here, I think, we have for the first time in M. Maeterlinck's theatre the treatment of a legend already crystallised: a legend in England familiar to readers of Mr. John Davidson's poetry in "The Ballad of a Nun." It has also been treated by Miss Adelaide Anne Procter, and a singularly charming translation of the original Dutch version—for in Dutch we find it first told and first printed—may be found in the first volume of a publication called the "Pageant," issued some years ago. This version was translated by Mr. Laurence Housman and Mr. J. Simons; whether it be the oldest or the original version I am unable to say.

## Translator's Preface

This to explain why "Sister Beatrice" is not most obviously by M. Maeterlinck, and by no one else.

LIDO, VENICE,  
May 10, 1900.

### II

IN translating "Ardiane and Barbe Bleue," which, like "Sister Beatrice," was written as a libretto, I have again used the ordinary "blank verse" line to represent the unrhymed French line of twelve syllables. But in the original text of this drama there are many passages in *vers libre*, both rhymed and otherwise. To make irregular metres readable in English requires no less than inspiration, and if inspiration is not always at the service of the poet it is still less often at the beck of the translator. In such passages I have therefore preserved, so far as

## Translator's Preface

possible, the original measures, but have in all cases, or nearly all, retained or added rhyme.

It was not easy to decide whether I should call our familiar hero-villain Bluebeard or Barbe Bleue. As children we connect him with Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves; but if he be anything less than universal he would appear to be French. Some would relegate him merely to the post of an accidentally baptized variety of the Myth of the Closed Chamber;<sup>1</sup> some identify him with a certain Marshal and Constable of France,<sup>2</sup> companion-in-arms to the Duke of Brittany; some say he is Henry VIII.; at all events one

<sup>1</sup> See "The Forbidden Chamber": E. Sidney Hartland, *Folk-lore Journal*, 1885, vol. iii. Also Mr. Lang's edition of Perrault. It was from Perrault that M. Maeterlinck obtained the legend, which he has altered to suit himself.

<sup>2</sup> See "Un Maréchal et un Connétable de France. La Barbe Bleue de la légende et de l'histoire," in the British Museum.

## Translator's Preface

Gilles de Laval, sieur de Rais, and lord in all of some eight goodly châteaux, for the most part in Brittany, constable and marshal as aforesaid, did commit certain atrocities upon certain women and children, though his wife survived him, and he was in 1440 executed therefor, at the age of thirty-six. One popular legend has it that the brothers of seven deceased wives arrived with Saint Gildas, whereupon the castle crumbled away, and the brothers killed the marshal and constable. Whether this feudal dignitary, who in his twenties was marshal, constable, and councillor to King Charles VII., was or was not the original of the Bluebeard legend, it is certain that of the ruins of his numerous castles all are known by the latter's name, and are connected with legends of his atrocities; and in one, the castle of Chantocé, which one Thiphaine or Triphine d'Anguille gave in 1100 to

## Translator's Preface

the forebears of one Marie de Crain, who in marriage brought it to Gui, father of Rais, father of Barbe Bleue, or Gilles de Laval, may be seen to this day a long subterranean hall, communicating with another, low and square, which is entered by three staircases. Chantocé is built on a flat rock, surrounded by a moat, and was defended by two towers with drawbridges. It is interesting to note that the depravity of Gilles was attributed to the fervent study of pernicious literature in his youth.

As the story of Bluebeard pure and simple, as distinguished from that of Bluebeard Gilles, is found in Greek, French, Tuscan, Icelandic, Esthonian, Gaelic, and Pasque, it seems unlikely that Gilles was the origin of the legend. It is most likely that the Myth of the Forbidden Chamber found, as all stories will sooner or later find, an exposition in

## Translator's Preface

actual life; so that the real drama, in course of years and popular relation, took to itself some or all of the international Forbidden Chamber details, while the Forbidden Chamber stories were given, in many countries, a name, and in France a local habitation—or rather some eight or nine such.

The name of the victorious and final wife is variable. Often it is Anne. Sometimes she finds the corpses, sometimes the heads; the wives, who are usually seven, are sometimes her sisters and sometimes not. Sometimes her brothers kill the polygamous husband; sometimes she has no brothers, and restores the wives to life, as she does in one of the Gaelic versions. In the version of Perrault, which is probably the original of all our English versions, she finds the bodies of the wives, and her brothers execute justice.

## Translator's Preface

When I thought of retaining the French name of the hero, it was, as I say, to preserve the reader from reminiscences of the pantomime and the Arabian Nights, which somehow do not "march together" with the drama of M. Maeterlinck. I finally determined to retain "Barbe Bleue" for the name of our hero because the names of all the other characters are French, and untranslatable, and it seemed to me that the contrast of the English name of our hero would still further accentuate the illegitimate Arabian and pantomimic reminiscences that, for some of us, cling to it. Plain "Bluebeard" is hardly congruous with these other names; we have never thought of our childhood's monster as the warden of a harem of maidens out of a play by M. Maeterlinck. The point is difficult as it is nice, and also trivial, and perhaps it is best to leave the reader to give our hero the name that



## Translator's Preface

his individual taste dictates. My apology is to disarm the captious.

A word as to the versification of these two translations. They are for the most part written in what is popularly called "blank verse." At the same time, besides employing the slight variations which precedence allows in such verse, I have introduced, here and there, what I conceive to be a variation especially desirable in a translation, wherein one cannot always, or often, choose one's words, and is sometimes compelled to employ a phrase that would, if handled in the ordinary way, be unmusical in the extreme. This variation consists in the employment of the well-known principle of catalexis where not to employ that principle would result in cacophony. To render certain concatenations of consonants, especially those containing sibilants, tolerable to the ear, I have allowed for the time which their

## Translator's Preface

pronunciation actually demands, by counting them as a syllable, so that the decasyllabic line, though still having the time of ten syllables, has only nine syllables in it if estimated in the ordinary way. An example of such a line is:—

“ Īn silēnce shed bēfōre ā queen's feet.”

Another example is—

“Open the fifth door.”—“Not even there?”

I should not have referred to this matter had not a critic quoted one of the above lines as a proof that I was ignorant of the elementary rules of versification.

BERNARD MIALL.

LONDON, *April* 18, 1901.

# SISTER BEATRICE

A MIRACLE PLAY IN THREE ACTS



## THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE HOLY VIRGIN (in the likeness of  
SISTER BEATRICE)

SISTER BEATRICE

THE ABBESS

SISTER EGLANTINE

SISTER CLEMENCY

SISTER FELICITY

SISTER BALBINA

SISTER REGINA

SISTER GISELA

THE PRIEST

PRINCE BELLIDOR

LITTLE ALLETTE

Beggars, Pilgrims, &c.

TIME—*The Thirteenth Century.* PLACE—*A  
Convent in the neighbourhood of Louvain.*

# SISTER BEATRICE

## ACT THE FIRST

*A corridor, in the centre of which is the great entrance-door of the convent. To the right, the door of the chapel, to which a few steps give access, makes an angle with the wall of the corridor. In the angle so formed an image of the VIRGIN, of the stature of an ordinary woman, stands within a niche, on a pedestal of marble, which is raised on steps and enclosed within a grille. The image is attired after the Spanish manner, in vestments of silk and precious brocades, which give it the semblance of a celestial princess. A broad girdle, wrought in*

## Sister Beatrice

*gold, encircles the waist, and a golden fillet, on which glitter precious stones, confines, like a diadem, the tresses of woman's hair that fall about the shoulders of the image. To the left of the convent door is seen the cell of SISTER BEATRICE. The door of the cell is ajar. The white-washed cell is furnished with a chair, a table, and a pallet-bed. It is night. Before the VIRGIN a lamp is burning, and at her feet is prostrated SISTER BEATRICE.*

### BEATRICE

Pity me, Lady : me about to fall  
In mortal sin, for he is coming back  
To-night, to-night, and I am alone !  
What must I say to him, what must I do ?  
He looks at me with trembling hands,  
and I—

I know not what it is that he desires.  
Since I came first into this holy house

## Sister Beatrice

Four years are nearly gone—ay, four years  
quite

But for six weeks, when August meets  
July.

Then I knew nothing: I was quite a  
child:

And now I still know nothing; nor I dare  
Ask of the Abbess, nor to any tell

This matter that torments my heart—this  
woe,

Or else, this happiness. It is, they say,  
Allowed to love a man in marriage: he,  
When first of all I leave the convent, says,  
Before he even kiss me, there shall be  
A hermit, one who does miraculous things,  
One that he knows, who shall unite us  
both.

We are told often of the lures of sin,  
And of the snares of man: but him you  
know;

He is not like the others. Long ago,  
When I was little, he would often come

## Sister Beatrice

Into my father's garden of a Sunday ;  
We played together there. Him I forgot,  
But oftentimes I would remember that  
When I was miserable, or in my prayers.  
Pious he is and wise : his eyes are gentler  
Than those of a little child that kneels to  
pray.

Here at your feet he knelt the other  
night,  
Under the lamp : did you not see him  
there ?

To look at, like your Son. Gravely he  
smiles,

As if he spoke to God, though but to me,  
To me who cannot answer him he speaks,  
Me who have no possessions. See, I tell  
you

All : for I seek not to deceive you : see,  
I am very wretched, though for three days  
now

I have been unable to cry any more.  
Did I refuse to listen to his prayer



## Sister Beatrice

He swore that he would die! And I  
have heard

That such a thing may happen; such as  
he,

Men that are beautiful, and tall, and  
young,

Have slain themselves because of love.

One day

They spoke of this to Francis and to  
Paul.

If this be true I know not: but the earth  
Is full of trouble, and they tell us naught.

O Mother, hear! I know not what to  
do!

And who knows, Mother, that these  
trembling hands

Held forth to your holy image shall not  
be

Torches unquenchable in the blaze of Hell  
To-morrow?

*[There is heard without the sound of  
many approaching horsemen.]*

## Sister Beatrice

Listen! Listen! Do you hear?  
There are horses — many! Now they  
stop! Ah, now  
Feet on the threshold! now they try the  
door!

*[A knock on the great door.*

What, what to do? Mother, I will not  
go,

I will not, if you wish it!

*[She rises, and runs to the door.*

Bellidor?

BELLIDOR (*from without*)

Yes, open quickly, Beatrice! it is I!

BEATRICE

Yes, yes!

*[She throws wide open the door of  
the convent, and BELLIDOR,  
clad in a coat of mail and a  
long blue cloak, is seen upon  
the threshold. On his right*

## Sister Beatrice

*hand is a boy laden with costly garments and glittering jewels. Not far from the door is an old man, who holds two richly-appointed horses by their bridles, and leads them to and fro beneath a tree. In the distance, under the starry sky, a limitless moonlit country.*

BEATRICE (*advancing*)

You are not alone? Who is it there,  
Under the tree?

BELLIDOR

Draw nigh, and have no fear!  
[*Kneeling upon the threshold he kisses the hem of BEATRICE'S robe.*

O, beautiful, as you come forward so,  
Beatrice! to front the stars that wait for  
you

## Sister Beatrice

As you upon the threshold trembling  
stand!

Surely they know a mighty happiness  
Has come to birth, and, like the dust of  
gold

In silence shed before a queen's feet,  
They are strewn over all the long blue ways  
We go to travel through. What is it?  
Say!

What would you, what? O, do your feet  
already

Falter? You turn your head? O no,  
no, no!

My arms enlace you, hold you forever  
fast

In the sight of Heaven! No! you shall  
not fly,

For my enchaining love delivers you!

O come, come, seek no more the shadows  
dim

Of the lamps wherein love slumbered.  
Love has seen

## Sister Beatrice

The light he never saw before : the light  
Whose every passing ray his triumph gilds,  
Unites our youthful spirits, and ensures  
Our destinies. O Beatrice, Beatrice !

Behold, I see you, I am near you, touch,  
Embrace you and salute you the first time !

*[At these words he abruptly rises,  
seizes BEATRICE about the  
body, and kisses her on the lips.]*

BEATRICE (*recoiling, and feebly defending  
herself*)

No, do not kiss me ! You had promised  
me !

BELLIDOR (*redoubling his kisses*)

O, those were never promises of love !  
Love cannot say that love will not adore,  
And lovers make no promises ; never they  
Shall promise aught who once have given  
all !

Love every moment gives the all it has,

## Sister Beatrice

And if it promise to reserve or stay  
One kiss, it gives a hundred thousand more  
To efface the wrong done to its lips itself.

*[Embracing her more ardently and  
seeking to draw her away.]*

Come, come! The night is passing, and  
the sky

Already paler, and the horses fret.

There is now one step only more to take,  
One to descend—

*[Suddenly observing that BEATRICE is  
failing in his arms.]*

You do not answer me?

I do not hear you breathe: your knees  
give way!

Come! Never wait until the envious  
dawn

Outlays its golden snares across the path  
That leads to happiness!

BEATRICE (*who is almost swooning*)

No, I cannot yet!

## Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR

Love, you grow pale ! and all my kisses  
die

Quenched on your lips like sparks in waters  
cold.

Raise your fair face, and give me your  
dear mouth,

That strives to smile no more. Oh ! it  
is this,

This heavy veil that so constrains your  
throat,

And weighs upon your heart. 'Twas  
made for death,

Never for life !

*[With slow and cautious movements  
he unwraps the veil which  
envelops the face of BEATRICE,  
who is still unconscious. Pre-  
sently the first tresses of hair  
begin to fall, then others and  
still others, till at last all, like*

Sister Beatrice

*flames unimprisoned, fall suddenly over BEATRICE'S face. She seems to awaken.*

BELLIDOR (*with a cry of ecstasy*)

O!

BEATRICE (*softly, as if she came from a dream*)

Ah, what have you done,  
Bellidor? What is this my hands perceive?  
This softness that is tender with my face?

BELLIDOR (*passionately kissing her dishevelled hair*)

Behold, behold! It is your proper fire  
Awakens you, and you are overwhelmed  
With your own beauty! Lo, you are  
enmeshed  
With your own radiance! O, you never  
knew,  
I never knew, how beautiful you were!



## Sister Beatrice

I thought that I had seen you, and I  
thought

I loved you! Ay, and but a moment  
gone

You were the fairest of my boyish dreams :  
Most beautiful of all most beautiful

I find you now to my awakened eyes,  
And to my hands that touch you, and in  
my heart

That now discovers you ! Ah, wait, wait,  
wait !

You must in all be like your face—must  
be

Utterly liberated, wholly queen !

*[He removes BEATRICE'S mantle with a sudden gesture, and she appears clad in a robe of white woollen ; then, while he makes a sign in the direction of the door, and the boy who was with him at the opening of the scene draws near, bearing costly*

## Sister Beatrice

*raiment, a golden girdle, and a necklet of pearls, BEATRICE falls to kneeling on the flags, prostrate and sobbing, her face hidden in the folds of the mantle and veil, which she has gathered up.* •

### BEATRICE

No, no! I would—I would not!  
[*Moving on her knees to the VIRGIN'S feet.*]

O, you see,  
Lady! I cannot struggle any more!  
No, not without you succour me! I can  
pray  
No more, no more, if you abandon me!

BELLIDOR (*hastening to BEATRICE and wrapping her in the costly garments which he has taken from the child*)

It is time, Beatrice! See the raiment, see  
The raiment of your life that now begins!

## Sister Beatrice

You are no slave I rescue from her lord,  
You are a queen I bring to happiness!

BEATRICE (*still kneeling, her hands clinging  
to the grille that encloses the base of  
the image*)

Our Lady, hear me! I can speak no more,  
And no more can I any longer pray;  
No, I can only sob. I did not know  
I loved him quite like this; I did not  
know

That I loved you so much. O listen,  
look!

All that I ask you is a sign, a sign,  
. A sign of your hand, a smile of your eyes,  
no more!

I am only a girl who does not under-  
stand . . .

\* They have so often told me that you  
grant

Everything, and that you were very kind,  
That you were pitiful . . .

## Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR (*endeavouring to raise her up,  
and to draw her gently away from  
the grille*)

Ay, so she is,  
For she is queen of a heaven that love has  
made!

Unclasp these tender hands the iron chills,  
Look in her face—it is in no wise wroth,  
It smiles, it shines; her eyes have seen  
the prayer

That shines in yours; it is as though  
your tears

Illumed her eyes that smile. Is it not  
she

That asks, and you that pardon? In  
my eyes

You are confounded, and I seem to see  
Two sisters, and I know that love is  
here;

And they bless one another with their  
hands.

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*raising her head and looking  
at the VIRGIN*)

I was told often I was like her.

BELLIDOR

Look!

Regard, across your own, her tresses, thus,  
While so my hands outspread the shimmering veil.

Would you not say, rays of the self-same  
light,

The self-same bliss?

*[While he speaks three hours are  
struck on the convent clock.]*

BEATRICE (*suddenly rising*)

Listen!

BELLIDOR

Three hours!

BEATRICE

The hour

Of matins that I should have sounded!

## Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR

Come!

The dawn grows nigh, the windows pale  
to blue!

BEATRICE

The windows I would always open wide  
Before the dawn, so might the morning air,  
Fresh, and the daylight, and the song of  
birds

Welcome my sisters as they came from  
sleep.

There is the cord that rings the bell to say  
Night and their sleep are ended; there  
the door,

The chapel door of which no more my  
hands

Will push apart the leaves to greet the  
dawn,

And altar-candles other hands will light.

Here is the basket of the poor: ay, soon  
They will come hither, and will call my  
name,

## Sister Beatrice

And see no one at all, and vainly seek  
These hands they are wont to bless when  
    I dispense  
The humble garments that my sisters sew  
In peace and silence of the spacious halls  
The while they pray . . .

BELLIDOR

Come, for the day is nigh ;  
Your sisters will awaken ; and it seems  
Already that I hear their steps re-  
    sound . . .

BEATRICE

Ay, they are coming, ay, my sisters come,  
Who loved me all so well, and held me too  
So holy ! Here will they discover all  
That of the lowly Beatrice remains ;  
Her veil and mantle lying on the stones.

*[Suddenly she takes up the veil and  
    mantle and deposits them on the  
    grille at the feet of the image.]*

## Sister Beatrice

But no ; I would never one of them should  
think

I trampled underfoot the robe of peace  
They gave me, Mother—see, I give them  
you,

And you will keep them. In your hands  
I place

All my possessions, all that I received  
In these four years.

I lay my chaplet here,  
My chaplet with the cross of silver ; here  
My discipline, and here the three great  
keys

I carried at my girdle : this the key  
That opens the great door ; the garden,  
this,

And this, the chapel. I shall see no  
more

The garden growing green, and no more  
now

Unlock the chapel where we used to  
sing





## Sister Beatrice

BELLIDOR (*embracing her and kissing her passionately on the lips*)

Come!

BEATRICE (*for the first time returning his kiss*)

Yes!

[*Enlaced in one another's arms, they go forth into the dawning world. The door is left open. Soon is heard the sound of horses that gallop away away into the distance. The curtain falls, and shortly afterwards the bell of the convent is heard in the dawn, loudly ringing matins.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT

## ACT THE SECOND

*The last strokes of the bell ringing matins are heard. Then the curtain rises. The scene is that of the last Act, save that now the great door of the convent is closed, and all the corridor windows are open to the first rays of the sun. Hardly has the curtain risen when the VIRGIN, as at the end of a long, divine sleep, is seen to stir, to come to life ; then slowly she descends the steps of the pedestal, and reaches the grille, and over her glorious robe and tresses she puts on the veil and mantle that BEATRICE has abandoned. Then, as she begins to sing softly under her breath, she turns to the right, stretching forth her hand, when, through the door*

## Sister Beatrice

*of the chapel, which opens to her gesture, are seen the tapers of the altar ; which are magically one by one being kindled ; then, continuing her holy song, she revives the flame of the lamp, and having placed before the pedestal the basket which contains the garments to be given to the poor, she advances to the great door of the convent.*

THE VIRGIN (*singing*)

I hold to every sin,  
To every soul that weeps,  
My hands with pardon filled  
Out of the starry deeps.

There is no sin that lives  
If love have vigil kept ;  
There is no soul that dies  
If love but once have wept.

## Sister Beatrice

And though in many paths  
Of earth love lose its way,  
Its tears shall find me out,  
And shall not go astray.

*[During the last words of the song a hand knocks timidly at the gate of the convent. The VIRGIN opens; and there appears on the threshold a little girl, barefooted, and very ragged and poor. She is half hidden behind the oaken door-post; she advances only her head, and gazes at the VIRGIN with astonishment.]*

## THE VIRGIN

Good day, Allette, why do you hide yourself?

*[Enraptured and afraid, making the sign of the cross as she approaches.]*

## Sister Beatrice

ALLETTE

Why have you put that light upon your  
robe ?

THE VIRGIN

After the dawn there is light everywhere.

ALLETTE

Why have you put those stars into your  
eyes ?

THE VIRGIN

There are often stars in the depth of eyes  
that pray.

ALLETTE

Why have you put that light inside your  
hands ?

THE VIRGIN

There is always light in the hands of alms-  
givers.

ALLETTE

I have come alone here.

Sister Beatrice

THE VIRGIN

Where are our poor brothers?

ALLETTE

They dare not come because of what folk  
say.

THE VIRGIN

What do they say?

ALLETTE

They say that they have seen  
Beatrice riding on the Prince's horse.

THE VIRGIN

Am I not like the lowly Beatrice?

ALLETTE

They say they have seen her—that she  
spoke to them.

THE VIRGIN

Only God saw her not, and nothing heard.

*[Taking the child in her arms and  
kissing her on the forehead.]*

## Sister Beatrice

O little one, Allette, there is no one else  
To-day that I can kiss. Ay, innocence  
Cannot betray me, though it comprehend.

*[Looking into the child's eyes.]*

How pure the human soul when thus one  
sees it !

Most beautiful the angels are, but they  
Never know tears. Poor child, enough,  
enough !

Behold yours falling ; you shall know  
their number !

*[She sets the child down on the threshold.]*

But our poor brothers—where are they ?

Allette, .

Go forth to them, and tell them all of  
love

Full of impatience : go, and bid them  
haste.

ALLETTE (*who turns her head and looks  
away from the convent*)

O Sister Beatrice, they are coming—see !



## Sister Beatrice

*[And indeed the poor, the sick and infirm, the women carrying little children, have timidly drawn nigh, and, thinking that they recognise BEATRICE, fearful, hesitating, and astonished, they approach the threshold, and, halting outside the door, they gaze and wait.]*

THE VIRGIN (*leaning over the poor-basket, which contains clothes*)

What has befallen? Brothers, wherefore stay?

Hasten! the sun already mounts: the time

Is ripe for prayer; shortly my sisters pass.  
The door will soon be shut; then, till the morrow,

No more of alms. O come you, all of you!

O hasten, all of you; the time is now.

## Sister Beatrice

A POOR OLD MAN (*coming forward*)

Now, sister, we to-night have seen two  
ghosts . . .

THE VIRGIN (*giving him a cloak, which  
suddenly becomes radiant as she draws  
it out of the basket*)

Dream now no more of phantoms of the  
night.

A CRIPPLE (*advancing in turn*)

We have had wicked thoughts this night,  
my sister.

THE VIRGIN (*drawing from the basket  
another garment, which seems suddenly  
to become covered with jewels*)

Open your eyes, my brother : it is now  
The hour of pardon. Come, O all of  
you, come !

## Sister Beatrice .



### A POOR WOMAN

I, sister, for my mother need a shroud . . .

### ANOTHER POOR WOMAN

I beg you, sister, that our latest-born . . .

*[The ' poor folk, lamenting, and greedy of charity, their arms outheld, press in a crowd about the VIRGIN, who, leaning over the basket, fills her arms from it again and again with garments glittering with rays of light, sparkling veils, and robes of linen that grow luminous. In measure as the VIRGIN exhausts the basket it overflows with a still greater abundance of raiment, more and more costly, and more and more resplendent; and as though intoxicated by the*

## Sister Beatrice

*miracle she herself has worked,  
she cries out, as she distributes  
her treasures to the poor folk,  
filling their hands, covering  
their shoulders, and wrapping  
their infants in dazzling and  
blazing tissues.*

### THE VIRGIN

O come you hither, hither, all of you  
come !

The snowy shroud is here, and here behold  
The smiling swaddling-bands ! Ay, here  
behold

Life, death, and life again ! Come hither  
all !

It is the hour of love : and what of love ?  
It has no limits ! Come you, all of you,  
come !

Give one another aid ! and all offence  
Let each forgive the other ! And through  
life

## Sister Beatrice

Mingle your happinesses and your tears !  
Love one another : pray for those that  
fall :

Come all, come hither, all of you pass by !  
Come, all of you ! God does not see the  
ill

Done without hatred. Pardon one another :  
There is no sin forgiveness does not reach.

*[Now the poor people, stupefied and bewildered, are covered with resplendent garments. Some, their raiment rustling with precious stones, waving and swaying as they go, flee into the open, shouting for joy. Others, sobbing for gratitude, surround the holy VIRGIN, and seek to kiss her hands. But the greater number, silent, and as though smitten with a divine terror, kneel upon the steps of the entrance and murmur their*

## Sister Beatrice

*prayers. Then a stroke of the bell is heard ; the basket is suddenly exhausted ; the VIRGIN gently disperses the poor folk who press about her, and closes the door on them.*

## THE VIRGIN

Go in peace, brethren : 'tis the hour of prayer.

*[The murmur of the poor folk at prayer is still heard through the closed door. The murmur little by little becomes an indistinct hymn of gratitude and ecstasy. A second, then a third stroke of the bell resounds ; and proceeding from the left end of the corridor the NUNS, with the ABBESS at their head, advance toward the chapel.*

## Sister Beatrice

THE ABBESS (*halting before the VIRGIN, who, with bended head, and hands disposed upon her breast, waits by the closed door*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice. This month of sun  
Matins are rung a quarter short of three.  
Now you shall three days fast, shall three  
nights pray  
Before the Virgin's feet that was a  
mother.

THE VIRGIN (*bowing with the humblest  
gestures of assent*)

• My Mother, God be praised!

[THE ABBESS, *resuming her steps, reaches the pedestal, which before was hidden from her by the wall from which springs the vaulting of the great doorway. There she is about to kneel, when, upon raising her eyes,*

## Sister Beatrice

*she stops, cries aloud, lets fall the book that she carries, and makes a gesture of unspeakable surprise and horror.*

## THE ABBESS

She is not there!

*[Disquieted, then terrified, the NUNS run to the ABBESS, surrounding her and crowding about the pedestal. The first moment of stupefaction having passed, they all speak, cry aloud, moan, and lament at the same moment, by turns outraged, terrified, sobbing, upright, kneeling, prostrated, or staggering.]*

## THE NUNS

She is no longer there!

The Virgin gone!

Her image has been stolen!

Infidels!



## Sister Beatrice

Our Mother, O our Mother!

Sacrilege!

The cloister is profaned!

O Sacrilege!

The roof will fall upon us!

Sacrilege!

Sacrilege!

Sacrilege!

Sacrilege!

THE ABBESS (*calling aloud*)

Sister Beatrice!

[*The VIRGIN advances, and halts before the pedestal, close to the ABBESS. She gazes fixedly at the spot where her image used to stand, and her impassive eyes and face, as though sealed from the outer world, are, as it were, radiant with an imperturbable hope and silence.*]

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS

You, Sister Beatrice, were she in charge,  
And it was yours by day or night to wake  
And watch above the majesty of her  
Who made this convent-house her treasury  
Of graces, and to house her predilections :  
I understand your anguish, and your fear  
I share. Yet fear you naught! The

Will Divine

Has oftentimes designs that must confound

Our vigilance and zeal. But answer me;  
Speak, for you must have seen; speak,  
you must know!

[*The VIRGIN is silent.*

Answer me! Speak! What is amiss  
with you?

It seems to me there is somewhat strange  
—it seems

At moments that your face grows  
radiant . . .

## Sister Beatrice

And say, what are these garments, now  
no more

The same as all we wear? Why, do my  
eyes

Deceive me? One that looks at you  
would say

You are no more the same. What have  
you there,

There, there, beneath your mantle, this  
that gleams

So brightly through it?

· [*She feels the VIRGIN'S mantle.*

Ay, and what this stuff

Whose folds translucent run ablaze with  
light,

When my hands touch it?

[*She opens the VIRGIN'S mantle, and be-  
holds the girdle of wrought gold.*

Mercy! What is this?

[*She removes the mantle entirely, and  
in the same moment of out-  
raged stupefaction she snatches*

## SISTER BEATRICE

*off the veil which covers the VIRGIN's hair, and the latter, always motionless, and as though insensible, appears suddenly clothed after the manner of and exactly in all points resembling her image that occupied the pedestal during the First Act. At this spectacle there falls on the ABBESS and the NUNS who crowd round her a moment of silent stupefaction and incredulous anguish. Then the ABBESS, who is the first to regain control over herself, covers her face with a gesture of despairing horror and malediction, and cries :*

Lord God !

## THE NUNS

Our Lady ! She has robbed the image !  
Speak, Sister Beatrice !

## Sister Beatrice

She does not answer !  
The Demons ! O, the Demons !  
Beware the walls !  
They will avenge themselves !  
O madness, madness !  
O horror, horror ! Let us not await  
The thunder-bolt ! O sacrilege, sacrilege !  
Sacrilege ! Sacrilege !

*[There is a movement of recoil, terror,  
and flight among the NUNS ; but  
the ABBESS restrains them, raising  
her hands and her voice.]*

## THE ABBESS

Listen all, my daughters !  
Nay, do not fly ! Let us await our lot ;  
Let us not separate ; let all our hands  
And all our prayers hedge in the sacrilege,  
And strive to appease the ensuing wrath !

## SISTER CLEMENCY

I pray,  
Mother, you will not tarry !

Sister Beatrice

SISTER FELICITY

Let us go

To find the priest !

SISTER CLEMENCY

I saw him passing by  
Deep in the chapel.

THE ABBESS

You are right ; yes, go,  
Sisters Felicity and Clemency.

Go quickly ; yes, go quickly ; he will know  
Better than we what should be done to  
stay,

If yet it be not all too late to stay,  
The sword of the Archangel, and to foil  
The triumph of the Accursèd One. Ah  
me !

My sisters, my poor sisters ! Horror has  
A name no longer, and our eyes have  
plumbed

The deepest abyssms of hell !

## SISTER BEATRICE

SISTER GISELA (*approaching the VIRGIN*)

Profanatrix!

SISTER BALBINA (*also approaching her*)

Sacrilege! Sacrilege!

SISTER REGINA' (*beside herself*)

Demon! Demon! Demon!

SISTER EGLANTINE (*in a mournful and  
very gentle voice*)

O, Sister Beatrice, what have you done?

[*At the sound of this voice the  
VIRGIN turns her head, and  
looks at SISTER EGLANTINE  
with a smile of divine sweet-  
ness.*

SISTER BALBINA (*to SISTER EGLANTINE*)

She looks at you.

SISTER GISELA

She seems to awake.

SISTER EGLANTINE

Perhaps

You did not know—

THE ABBESS

No, Sister Eglantine,  
I will not have you speak to her!

*[At this moment the PRIEST, wearing his priestly appointments, appears at the door of the chapel, followed by two NUNS and the terrified Choristers.]*

THE PRIEST

Pray, pray!

My sisters, pray for her!

THE ABBESS (*throwing herself on  
her knees*)

You know, my father . . .



## Sister Beatrice

THE PRIEST (*in a stern voice*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice!

[*The VIRGIN remains motionless.*

THE PRIEST (*in a loud voice*)

Sister Beatrice!

[*The VIRGIN remains motionless.*

THE PRIEST (*in a terrible voice*)

Hear, Sister Beatrice! Now, for the third  
time

I call you, in the name of the living God,  
Whose anger trembles round about these  
walls—

I call you by your name!

THE ABBESS

She does not hear!

SISTER REGINA

She does not wish to hear!

Sister Beatrice

SISTER BALBINA

O misery !

O woe to all of us !

SISTER GISELA

Father ! Intercede !

Have pity on us !

THE PRIES'.

Doubt is at an end.

Now do I recognise the gloomy pride  
Of the Prince of Darkness and the Father  
of Pride.

*[Turning to the ABBESS.*

My sister, I deliver her to you,  
And mark that man's indulgence nowise  
may  
Cheat the prerogatives of Love Divine.  
Go, go, my sisters ; drag the culprit forth  
To the foot of the holy altars ; then tear  
off, .

## Sister Beatrice

There, in the presence of that One to  
whom

The angels bow—there tear off, one by  
one,

The vestments and the gems of sacri-  
lege.

Unloose your girdles ; every scourge twist  
tight,

And from the pillars of the portal  
take

The heavy lashes of prevaricators,

And rods of grievous penance. May  
your arms

Be cruel, may your hands be pitiless !

Mercy it is that lends them strength, and  
Love

That blesses them ! Go forth, my sisters,  
go !

*[The NUNS drag the VIRGIN away.  
She walks indifferent in their  
midst, docile and impassive.  
All, save SISTER EGLANTINE,*

## Sister Beatrice

*have already untied the double-knotted cords which gird their loins. They enter the chapel, and the doors close ; only the PRIEST remains, and bows himself before the forsaken pedestal. There is for some time silence. Suddenly a song of unspeakable sweetness filters through the doors of the chapel. It is the sacred canticle of the VIRGIN, the Ave Maris Stella, which sounds as though sung by the distant voices of angels. Little by little the hymn becomes more distinct, draws near, grows fuller, becomes universal, as though an invisible host, ever more and more innumerable, took it up with a might ever more and more ardent, ever more and more celestial. At*

## Sister Beatrice

*the same time there is heard from within the chapel the sound of seats overturned, of candelabras falling, of stalls thrown into confusion, and the exclamations of terrified human voices. Finally the two leaves of the door are violently thrown wide, and the nave appears all inundated with flames and strange splendours, which undulate, blossom forth, gyrate, and sweep past one another, infinitely more dazzling than the splendour of the sun whose rays light the corridor. Then, amid the delirious Alleluias and Hosannas which burst forth on every hand—confounded, haggard, transfigured, mad with joy and superhuman awe, waving armsful of blossoming boughs*

## Sister Beatrice

*that overflow with miraculous flowers which increase their ecstasy, enveloped from head to foot in living garlands which fetter their steps, blinded by the rain of flower-petals which stream from the vaulting—the NUNS tumultuously surge into the too narrow doorway, and uncertainly descend the steps, encumbered by the marvellous showers; and while at each step they strip their burdens of their flowers, only to see them renewing themselves in their hands, they surround the ancient PRIEST, who now again stands upright, those that follow advancing in turn through the billows of blossoms that surge continually over the steps of the chapel-door.*

## Sister Beatrice

THE NUNS (*all together and on every hand, while they emerge from the chapel, fill the corridor, singing and embracing one another amid the deluge of flowers*)

A miracle!

A miracle!

A miracle!

My father, O, my father!

I am blind!

My father, O, my father!

A miracle!

Hosanna!

O, Hosanna!

O, the Lord

Is close about us! O, the Heavens are open!

The angels overwhelm us, and the flowers Pursue us! Hosanna! Hosanna! Sister Beatrice

Is holy! Ring the bell, O peal the bell, Until the bronze be shattered! She is holy. Ah, Sister Beatrice is holy, holy!

## Sister Beatrice

### SISTER REGINA

I sought to touch her holy vestments.  
Then—

SISTER EGLANTINE (*crowned with flowers  
more radiant than the rest*)

The flames brake forth, the shafts of  
light spoke !

### SISTER CLEMENCY

The angels of the altars toward us turned !

### SISTER GISELA

The saints bowed over her, and joined their  
hands !

### SISTER EGLANTINE

And all the statues of the pillars knelt !



## Sister Beatrice

### SISTER FELICITY

The archangels all their wings unfurled  
and sang!

SISTER GISELA (*waving heavy garlands  
of roses*)

And living roses brake her bonds in twain!

SISTER BALBINA (*waving enormous stems  
of lilies*)

Miraculous lilies blossomed on the rods!

SISTER FELICITY (*waving luminous  
palm-branches*)

The lashes blazed into long golden palms!

THE ABBESS (*kneeling at the feet of  
the PRIEST*)

My father, O my father, I have sinned.  
For Sister Beatrice is holy!

## Sister Beatrice

THE PRIEST (*kneeling also*)

Yea !

My daughters, yea, my daughters, I have  
sinned !

Behold the ways of God past finding  
out !

*[At this moment there is heard a knock on the entrance-door of the convent, and the VIRGIN, once more human of aspect, and humbly clad in the mantle and veil of BEATRICE, appears in the threshold of the chapel. She descends the steps, her eyes downcast and her hands folded together, passes among her kneeling sisters, over the flowers, which stand erect as she goes, and resuming, as if nothing had happened, the duties of her charge, she goes to the door and*

## Sister Beatrice

*throws it open wide. Three pilgrims enter, poor, old, and haggard, to whom she bows low, and taking from a tripod of bronze near by the aspergus and the basin of silver, she sprinkles the water over their ponderous hands in silence.*

THE END OF THE SECOND ACT

## ACT THE THIRD

*The scene is the same. On the pedestal the image of the VIRGIN stands, as in the First Act ; the veil, mantle, and keys of SISTER BEATRICE are hanging on the grille ; the chapel-door is open, and the candles of the altar are lit ; the lamp is burning before the image, and the poor-basket overflows with clothing : in a word, all is precisely as it was at the moment when the NUN fled with PRINCE BELLIDOR, except that the entrance-door of the convent is now closed. It is early dawn in winter ; the last strokes of matins are heard, though no one rings the bell, and in the porch of the chapel the bell-rope is seen to rise and fall in empty air. Then,*

## Sister Beatrice

*the bell having ceased to sound, a silence falls, which is broken by three blows struck slowly on the convent door. At the third blow the door moves without sound on its hinges, though no one opens it ; and the two leaves are thrown wide open on the white, desolate, vacant countryside ; and, amid the whirling of the snow which drives upon the threshold there advances, haggard, thin, and unrecognisable, she who was once SISTER BEATRICE. She is covered with rags ; her hair, already grey, is scattered over her face, which is grievously pinched and livid. Her eyes, bruised and black, have in them only the remote and impassive gaze of those who are about to die, and hold no longer any shadow of hope. She halts a moment in the open doorway, and then, as she beholds no one, she enters, swaying, groping, and leaning on the*

## Sister Beatrice

*doors, sweeping the corridor with her eyes, with the uneasiness of an animal long hunted. But the corridor is empty, and she takes a few more fearful steps, until, perceiving the image of the VIRGIN, she gives a cry, in which are mingled who shall say what vain and weary hopes of deliverance? — and throws herself, kneeling and fainting, at the feet of the statue.*

### BEATRICE

My Mother, I am here! Repulse me  
not,

For you are all I have now in the world!  
I hoped that I should see you once again,  
And I have come too late, because my  
eyes

Are closing: I no longer see you smile;  
And when I stretch my hands out after  
you

## Sister Beatrice

I feel they are dead. I have forgotten  
how

To pray, I have forgotten how to speak,  
And—since I needs must tell you every-  
thing—

I have wept so many tears that long ago  
I lost all heart ever to cry again.

Forgive me, O forgive me, if I speak  
A name that never should again be heard :  
You would not recognise your daughter  
else.

O see to what estate have brought her  
love,

And sin, and all that men call happiness !

I left you more than twenty years ago ;

And if so be 'tis not the will of God

Men should be happy, surely then to me

He should intend no ill, for' happy—O,

I have not been that ! Thus I to-day  
return,

But ask for nothing, for the hour is gone,

And to receive I have no longer strength.

## Sister Beatrice

I come to die here in this holy house,  
If but my sisters will permit that I  
Fall where I fall. O, never doubt, they  
know !

The scandal of my life has been so  
great

Down yonder in the town, they will have  
heard . . .

But they, they know so little ; even you,  
You who know all things, you will never  
know

The wickedness that they have made me  
do,

And all that I have suffered.

I would fain  
Tell them to all, the agonies of love !

*[Looking around her.*

But why am I alone? Lo, all the house  
Is void as though my sins had emptied  
it . . .

O, who has taken up the place I fled,  
My place before the holy altars, who?



## Sister Beatrice

Who guards the threshold that my feet  
have soiled ?

The lamp is lit: I see the tapers shine ;  
Matins have rung, and here behold the  
day

That grows, and none appears.

*[Perceiving the mantle and veil  
that hung upon the grille.*

But what is here ?

*[She raises herself a little, draws  
nearer on her knees, and feels the  
veil and mantle.*

Already my poor hands are so near death  
They know no longer if the things they  
touch

Are things of this life or the other  
world :

But is not this the mantle that I left . . .  
Yesterday . . . five - and - twenty years  
ago ?

*[Taking up the mantle and mechani-  
cally putting it on.*

## Sister Beatrice

It seems the shape—and yet seems very  
long.

When I was happy, when I went erect,  
It fitted well enough.

*[Taking the veil.*

Now the long veil,  
That now shall be my winding-sheet. O

Mother,

Forgive me if it be a sacrilege !

I am cold, I am naked ; for my wretched  
clothes

No longer know my body how to hide,  
That knows no longer where to hide itself.  
Was it not you, my Mother, kept them  
safe,

Is it not you who give them to me now  
Against the hour redoubtable, that thus  
The pitiless flames that wait me may per-  
haps

A little hesitate and be less cruel ?

*[A sound of steps and of opening  
doors is heard.*

## Sister Beatrice

What do I hear ?

*[Three strokes of the bell resound, announcing, as before, the arrival of the NUNS in the corridor.]*

What do I hear? O Mother!  
The door swings open, and my sisters  
come!

I cannot! Never! O, have pity, pity!  
For the walls crush me, the light suffocates,  
And shame, shame, shame, is graven on  
the stones

That rise up, up against me! Ah! Ah!  
Ah!

*[She falls fainting at the feet of the image. The NUNS, preceded by the ABBESS, advance along the vaulted passage, as in the preceding Act, on their way to the chapel. Many of them are very old; and the ABBESS walks painfully, bent double,*

## Sister Beatrice

*supporting herself on a staff. Scarcely have they entered but they perceive BEATRICE lying motionless across the corridor ; they run to her and crowd about her, uneasy, frightened, and dismayed.*

THE ABBESS (*who first sees her*)

O, Sister Beatrice is dead !

SISTER CLEMENCY

The Heavens  
Gave her, the Lord has taken her away !

SISTER FELICITY

Her crown was ready, and the angels called.

SISTER EGLANTINE (*raising and supporting the head of SISTER BEATRICE, which she kisses with a kind of pious awe*)

No, no, she is not dead : she shudders,  
breathes !

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS

But look, how pale she is ! But see, how thin !

### SISTER CLEMENCY

As though one night had aged her ten long years !

### SISTER FELICITY

She must have suffered, striving, till the dawn !

### SISTER CLEMENCY

And all alone against the angelic host  
That sought to draw her hence !

### SISTER EGLANTINE

She suffered much  
Already yesternight ; she trembled, wept,  
Who, ever since the miracle of flowers,  
Nursed in her eyes that smile miraculous.  
She would not have me take her place ;  
she said

## Sister Beatrice

“I wait,” she said, “until my saint returns.”

### SISTER BALBINA

What saint ?

[*The ABBESS, raising her eyes at hazard, sees the image of the VIRGIN re-established in the pedestal. The NUNS raise their heads, and, with the exception of SISTER EGLANTINE, who continues to hold the fainting form of BEATRICE in her arms, they all turn with cries of ecstasy and throw themselves on their knees at the foot of the pedestal.*

### THE NUNS

The Virgin has returned ! Our Lady !  
Our Mother is saved ! And she has all  
her jewels !  
Her crown is brighter, and her eyes more  
deep,

## Sister Beatrice

And sweeter her regard ! She has come  
back

From Heaven, and brought Heaven back  
again to us !

Yea, on the wings of her most holy  
prayers . . .

### SISTER EGLANTINE

Come, come ! I hear her heart no longer !  
Come !

*[The NUNS turn and once more  
crowd about BEATRICE.]*

### SISTER CLEMENCY (*kneeling near her*)

Ah, Sister Beatrice, you shall not leave  
Your sisters on this high miraculous day !

### SISTER FELICITY

The Virgin smiles on you ; her lips appeal !

### SISTER EGLANTINE

Alas, she cannot hear ! She seems to suffer ;  
Her face grows hollow—

## Sister Beatrice

SISTER CLEMENCY

Bear her to her bed.  
Come, let us bear her yonder to her cell.

SISTER EGLANTINE

No : let us rather leave her nigh to Her  
Who loves and fences her with miracles.

*[The NUNS enter the cell, returning  
with cloaks and linen sheets,  
on which they lay BEATRICE  
at the feet of the statue.]*

SISTER CLEMENCY

She cannot breathe—undo her veil and  
mantle.

*[She does as she advises, and the  
NUNS behold BEATRICE covered  
with rags.]*

SISTER FELICITY

My Mother, have you seen her dripping  
rags ?

SISTER BALBINA

O, she is quite benumbed with melting snow!



## Sister Beatrice

### SISTER CLEMENCY

We never knew her hair had grown so  
white.

### SISTER FELICITY

Her naked feet are soiled with wayside  
mire !

### THE ABBESS

Hold we our peace, my daughters ; for  
we live  
Near heaven ; the hands that touch her  
will remain  
Luminous.

### SISTER EGLANTINE

See, her breast is heaving ! See !  
Her eyes are going to open !

[BEATRICE opens her eyes, moves her  
head a little, and gazes about her.

BEATRICE (*as though emerging from a  
dream, and still bewildered, in a re-  
mote voice*)

When they died—

## Sister Beatrice

My children—when they died. . . . Why  
do you smile?  
They died of want.

### THE ABBESS

We do not smile ; we are glad,  
Ay, glad to see you coming back to life

### BEATRICE

I, coming back to life!

*[Looking about her with advancing  
recognition.]*

Yes, I remember,  
I came here in the depth of my distress.  
Look on me not so fearfully : I no more  
Shall be the butt of scandal : you shall now  
Have all your will of me. No, none  
shall know,  
If you should fear that any should ever  
tell—  
I shall say nothing. I submit to all,  
For they have broken all my body and  
soul.

## Sister Beatrice

I know it cannot be allowed that I,  
Here in this place, and at the Virgin's feet,  
So near the chapel, and so near to all  
That holy is and pure, should die. You  
are all,  
O, very good ; you have been patient ;  
yes ;  
You have not cast me out of doors at once.  
But if you may, if God allow it too,  
O, do not cast me forth too far from here !  
There is no need that any tend me now,  
No need that any me commiserate,  
Though I am very sick, I suffer now  
No more, no more. . . . Why have you  
laid me here,  
On these fair sheets of white? Alas!  
white sheets  
Are nothing to me now but a reproach,  
And straw polluted is the fitting bed  
Of dying sin. But you still look at me,  
And still say nothing. And you do not  
look

## Sister Beatrice

Angry. I see tears in your eyes. I think  
You do not know me yet.

THE ABBESS (*kissing her hands*)

But yes, yes, yes!  
Surely we know you, surely—you, our  
saint!

BEATRICE (*snatching away her hands in  
a kind of terror*)

Kiss not these hands—they have done so  
much ill!

SISTER CLEMENCY (*kissing her feet*)

O soul elect come down to us from heaven!

BEATRICE

Kiss not these feet that used to run to sin!

SISTER EGLANTINE (*kissing her forehead*)

I kiss this pure brow, crowned with  
miracles.

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*hiding her face in her hands*)

What would you all? What has befallen?

Once,

When I was happy, one was never  
pardoned ;

Kiss not this brow : it has been friends  
with lust !

But you that touched it, tell me who  
you are ?

I am not certain if my weary eyes

Betray me ; but if they see yonder still,

You are Sister Eglantine.

## SISTER EGLANTINE

Yes, I am she.

That Sister Eglantine whom you have  
loved.

## BEATRICE

You, five-and-twenty years ago, I told

I was unhappy.

## Sister Beatrice

### SISTER EGLANTINE

Five-and-twenty years  
Since, among all our sisters, God chose  
you.

### BEATRICE

You tell me that, and no least bitterness  
Lurks in your voice. What has befallen  
me

I cannot fathom. I am weak and ill,  
And cannot recollect—and every word  
Astounds me. I was inattentive. See,  
I think that you deceive yourselves. I  
am—

Cover your faces, make the holy sign!—  
I am Sister Beatrice!

### THE ABBESS

But yes, we know!  
Our Sister Beatrice, our sister, ours,  
Purest among us, the miraculous lamb,  
Godchild of angels, the immaculate flame!

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

Ah, is it truly you? I did not know.  
Mother, you used to go so upright; now  
How you do stoop! I have also learned  
to stoop,  
And now behold me fallen. Yes, I know  
All of you: there is Sister Clemency.

SISTER CLEMENCY (*bending her head  
and smiling*)

Yes, yes.

BEATRICE

Sister Felicity.

SISTER FELICITY (*smiling*)

It is.

Sister Felicity who came the first  
Out of the blossoming chapel.

BEATRICE

~~And I think~~  
You have not suffered, for you seem not  
sad.

I was the younger ~~and~~ I am the elder now.

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS

That is no doubt because of love divine  
Being a terrible burden.

### BEATRICE

Mother, no.  
It is the love of man that is the burden,  
The weary burden. You do pardon me,  
You also pardon me?

THE ABBESS (*kneeling at BEATRICE'S  
feet*)

O daughter mine,  
If any have need of pardon, it is she  
Who can at last prostrate herself before  
Your feet.

### BEATRICE

But do you know what I have done?

### THE ABBESS

You have done naught but miracle, have  
been,



## Sister Beatrice

Since the great day of flowers, our soul's  
light,  
The incense of our prayers, and the source  
Of grace, the gate of marvels!

BEATRICE

But I fled  
One night, now five-and-twenty years ago,  
With the Prince Bellidor.

THE ABBESS

Of whom do you speak,  
Of whom do you speak, my daughter?

BEATRICE

Of myself!  
I say myself! You will not understand?  
One evening, five-and-twenty years ago,  
I fled, and when three months were at an  
end  
He did not love me. Then I lost all  
shame,  
I lost all reason, and I lost all hope.

## Sister Beatrice

All men by turns this body have profaned,  
This clay to its God unfaithful. And I  
took

Pleasure in this, and called men after me.  
I fell so low that Heaven's angels thence  
Could not have risen for all their mighty  
wings.

So many crimes I have committed, I  
Have often even sin itself defiled !

THE ABBESS (*gently placing her hand on*  
BEATRICE'S *lips*)

Daughter, the Shadow tempts you ; speak  
no more,  
For rising anguish robs you of yourself.

SISTER CLEMENCY

She is worn out with miracle.

SISTER FELICITY

And grace

Confounds her.

## Sister Beatrice

SISTER EGLANTINE

The air of heaven weighs her down.

BEATRICE (*who struggles, pushes away the hand of the ABBESS and sits up*)

I do not wander! No, I tell you, no!  
This is no air of heaven, but of earth,  
And this is truth! Ah, you are all too  
mild!

You are too soft and imperturbable!  
And you know nothing! I would rather  
far

You should afflict me, but should learn at  
last!

O, you live here and do your penances,  
And say your prayers, and seek to expiate  
sin,

But look you, it is I, and all my kind,  
Who live beyond the pale and have no  
rest,

That do the bitterest penance to the end!

## Sister Beatrice

ABBESS

Pray, pray, my sisters ; now the final trial !

SISTER EGLANTINE

The triumph of the angels irks the Fiend !

BEATRICE

Yes, yes, it is the Fiend, the Fiend prevails !

See you these hands ? They have a human  
shape

No longer ; see, they cannot open now.

I had to sell them after soul and body.

They buy hands also when no more is left.

THE ABBESS (*wiping the sweat from*

BEATRICE'S *face*)

May Heaven's angels, who about thy  
couch

Now watch thee, deign before thy stream-  
ing face

To spread their wings !

## Sister Beatrice

### BEATRICE

Ah! Heaven's angels! Ah!  
Where are they, tell me, and what do  
they do?

Have I not told you? Why, I have not now  
My children, for the three most lovely died  
When I no more was lovely, and the last,  
Lest it should suffer, being one night mad,  
I killed. And there were others never born,  
Although they cried for birth. And still  
the sun  
Shone, and the stars returned, and justice  
slept,  
And only the most evil were happy and  
proud.

### THE ABBESS

The strife is terrible about great saints.

### SISTER EGLANTINE

It is at Heaven's gates the infernal fire  
Wastes the huge angers of its futile rage

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE (*falling back exhausted*)

I care no more—I stifle—what you will  
Be done to me. I had to tell you all.

SISTER EGLANTINE

The archangels bear her forth.

SISTER FELICITY

The phalanxes  
Of the celestial host have brought back  
peace.

THE ABBESS

The evil dream has fled. Now smile  
again,  
My poor and holy sister, while you think  
On all the blasphemies you did not speak.  
A baneful voice usurping on your lips  
Exhaled them in the rage of final loss

BEATRICE

It was my voice.

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS

My good and holy sister,  
Assure your heart, and have you no regrets.  
For that was not the voice that all we  
    know,  
The dear and gentle voice, the angel's pilot,  
The health of sickness, that so many years  
Quickened our prayers.

### SISTER EGLANTINE

Fear nothing, sister ; nay,  
In the last conflict you shall never lose  
The palm and diadem of a life of love,  
And innocence, and prayer.

### BEATRICE

Never one hour  
Since that unhappy hour, in all my life,  
There never was an hour that was not  
    marked  
By mortal sin.

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS \*

My daughter, pray to God!  
You are most holy; yet the enemy  
Tempts you, and scruples lead your sense  
    astray.  
How should you have committed all these  
    sins  
So dreadful? It is nigh on thirty years  
You have been here, of threshold and of  
    altar  
Most humble servitor: my very eyes  
Have followed you in all your deeds and  
    prayers,  
And I can answer before God for them  
As I would for my own. But would to  
    Heaven  
That mine were like to yours! It is not  
    here,  
Within these cloisters, but without, beyond,  
Out in the world estrayed, that sin  
    triumphs:



## Sister Beatrice

And of that world, all thanks to God, you  
know  
Nothing, for never have you issued forth  
Out of the shadow of the sanctuary.

## BEATRICE

Never gone forth? O, I can think no  
more!  
It was too long, so long, too long ago!  
I am near death; but you should tell me  
truth;  
Is it that you forgive me, or deceive,  
Unwilling I should know it?

## THE ABBESS

None deceives,  
None pardons. We have seen you every  
day  
Before the altar punctual, to our hours  
Attentive, and to all the humble cares  
Of alms and of the threshold.

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

I am here,  
My Mother, and I do not think I dream.  
Look at this hand : I tear it with my nails ;  
See, the blood shows and flows ; the blood  
is real.

I have no other proofs. So tell me now,  
If you have pity, here, in face of God,  
For we are close to God when people die,—  
If you do wish it, I will say no more,  
But if you can for pity tell me, now,  
What did you say, and what it was you  
did.

When five-and-twenty years ago you  
found  
One morning that the door was opened  
wide,  
The corridor deserted—when you found  
The altar abandoned—when you found  
the veil,  
The veil and mantle ? . . . Mother, I can  
no more.

## Sister Beatrice

### THE ABBESS

Daughter, this memory, I understand,  
Must trouble you and overwhelm you  
still,

Though five-and-twenty years ago befell  
The wondrous miracle whereby your God  
Elected you. The Virgin left us then,  
To mount again to heaven; ere she went  
Investing you with her most holy robe  
And sacred ornaments, and lastly crowned  
You with her golden crown, to teach us  
so

In boundless mercy that while she was  
gone  
You took her place.

### BEATRICE

But who then took my place

### THE ABBESS

Why, no one took it, since you still were  
there.

## Sister Beatrice

BEATRICE

There, every day? I was among you all?  
I moved, I spoke, you touched me with  
your hands?

THE ABBESS

As now, my child, I touch you with my  
hand.

BEATRICE

Mother, I know no more; except I think  
I have no longer strength to understand.  
I am still submissive, and I ask you naught.  
I feel that all are very good: I feel  
That death is very gentle.

Is it you

Who understand the soul is wretched—  
you?

There was no pardon here when here I  
lived.

I have said often, when I was not happy,  
God would not punish if He once knew all.  
But you are happy, and have learned it all.

## Sister Beatrice

In other days all folk ignored distress,  
In other days they cursed all those that  
sinned ;

But now all pardon, and all seem to  
know . . .

One of the angels, one would almost say,  
Had spoken out the truth. Mother, and  
you,

My Sister Eglantine, give me your hands—  
You are not angry with me? Tell them all,  
My sisters . . . what is it they should be  
told?

My eyes no longer open, and my lips  
Stiffen. . . . At last I fall asleep. I have  
lived

In a world wherein I knew not what de-  
sired

Hate and ill-will, and in another world  
I die, and understand not what desire,  
Nor whereat aim mercy and love.

*[She falls back exhausted among the  
sheets. Silence.]*

Sister Beatrice

SISTER EGLANTINE

She sleeps.

THE ABBESS

Pray, pray, my sisters, till the triumphant  
hour!

*[The NUNS fall on their knees around  
the bed of BEATRICE.]*

THE END OF SISTER BEATRICE

**ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE**

OR,

**THE USELESS DELIVERANCE**

*THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY*

ARDIANE

SELYSETTE

MELISANDE

YGRAINE

BELLANGERE

ALLADINE

A NURSE (foster-mother to ARDIANE)

BARBE BLEUE

Peasants, the Crowd.



# ARDIANE AND BARBE BLEUE

## ACT THE FIRST

*A vast, resplendent hall, of semi-circular form, in the castle of BARBE BLEUE. At the remoter end, in the centre of the semi-circular wall, is an enormous door ; on either hand of this are three smaller doors, of ebony, with locks and ornaments of silver ; each door is set within a niche, and all these niches are enclosed by a semi-circular colonnade of marble, the pillars of which support the balcony overhead. Above these doors, but set further back, are six great windows, to which the aforesaid balcony gives access ; these may be gained*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*from either side of the hall, by two flights of stairs, which follow the curve of the walls, and lead up to the semi-circular gallery.*

*It is evening ; the great windows are open, and the candelabra lit. Without, below the windows, is an invisible, excited crowd, whose cries, now uneasy, now terrified, now threatening, together with the sound of sudden movements, the trampling of feet, and the murmur of persons speaking, are heard with great distinctness. During the first bars of the overture the curtain rises, and the voices of the hidden crowd are at once heard above the music.*

### VOICES IN THE CROWD

So . . . she was in the chariot? Did  
you see?

All the village lingered there,  
There, to see her. . . Is she fair?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

She looked at me . . . And me . . . And me.  
O miserable child ! . . . Yet all the while  
She seemed to smile.

Whence hath she come ? . . . From very  
far away,

To know not . . . what awaits her here  
to-day.

Their journey hath endured for thrice  
ten days . . .

He cannot see us . . . shout, that he may  
know . . .

*[All together.*

Back ! Back ! . . . Advance no nearer !  
Never go

Up to the castle ! . . . It is death, death,  
death !

*[Isolated voices.*

She does not understand . . . I hear they  
say

No less than twenty men pursued her way,  
That dwelt about her home . . . You  
wonder why ?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Because they loved her. . . . Many used to  
cry

Along the roads. . . . Why has she come,  
O why ?

They tell me that she knew. . . . He shall  
not have her, no !

She is too fair for you ! . . . He shall  
not have her, no ! . . .

O see them, see them, there they go !

Where are they going ? . . . They are  
coming through,

By the red gate. . . . It is not true . . .

I see their torches in the avenue !

There the great chariot goes between the  
trees !

He is afraid. . . . He shall not have her, no !

He is mad, mad, mad ! He is mad ! He  
has done enough !

It is too much ! . . . So she will be the  
sixth !

O murderer, butcher ! . . . Death to the  
butcher, death !

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Fire, fire! . . . Bring fire! . . . I have  
brought my hay-fork, see!  
And I my scythe!—They are entering  
the yard . . .  
Hey, let me see! . . . Take care! . . .  
The gates are barred!  
Wait for them here. . . . They say she  
knows it all!  
What does she know? . . . She knows  
what I know too. . . .  
What do you know? . . . I know they  
all are dead!  
Not dead, not dead? . . . I buried them  
myself!  
But I one evening once as I went by  
Heard singing voices. . . . So did I. . . .  
And I . . .  
Ay, they come back, they say. . . . But he  
Brings down misfortune on our heads. . . .  
O see,  
The windows! . . . They are closing of  
themselves!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Now . . . they are going in! They are  
going in. . . .

Nothing to see! . . . Death to him!  
Death! Death! Death!

*[And at this moment the six great windows above the interior balcony close of their own motion, stifling little by little the voices of the crowd. Soon nothing is heard but an indefinite murmur which is almost silence. Shortly afterwards ARDIANE and the NURSE enter by a side door.]*

### THE NURSE.

Where are we? . . . Listen! . . . Ah! . . .  
that muttering there!

It is the peasants: they were eager, yes,  
To save us: yes, they ran along the roads,  
But never dared to speak: they made us  
signs, •

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

'They made us signs that meant we should  
return. . . .

*[She goes forward to the great door  
at the end of the hall.*

They are here, behind this door! . . . I  
hear them: some  
Tramp to and fro. . . . Now let us try  
to flee. . . .

He leaves us here alone: we can escape,  
Perhaps. . . . I tell you plainly, he is  
mad!

O, it is death! For all they say is true,  
He has killed five women. . . .

### ARDIANE

No, they are not dead . . .  
Yonder I heard it spoken of at times,  
In the far place whereto his savage love,  
That yet was tremulous, came to seek me  
out,  
As of a thing incomprehensible.  
I was suspicious of the truth, and here

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Am sure. He loves me : I am beautiful :  
So shall I learn his secret. But ere all  
We must be insubordinate. When the  
future  
Is threatening to us and inscrutable  
That is ere all our duty. For the rest,  
They were mistaken ; and if they are  
lost  
They were lost by hesitation.

Here are we,  
Within the outer hall whence opens out  
The chamber where his love awaits me.

Here  
Are keys he gave me of the treasure-  
chests  
Of bridal raiment, and the silver keys  
Are ours to use : the golden is forbid.  
That is the only one of import. These,  
The six, I cast away : the last I keep.

*[She throws away the keys of silver,  
which tinkle and ring on the  
marble flags.]*



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*who hastily picks them  
up again*)

What are you doing? He has given you  
The treasures, all the treasures that they  
open!

ARDIANE

Open them you, then, if it give you  
pleasure;  
For me, I seek for the forbidden door.  
Open the others if you will; but all  
That is permitted us will tell us nought.

THE NURSE (*looking at the keys and then  
about the hall*)

The doors are yonder, set within the  
marble,  
And we may know, since all have locks of  
silver;  
They answer to the keys: but first of all,  
Which one shall I unclose?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

What matter which?  
They are but there to turn aside our  
minds  
From that we need to know. . . . I do  
not find,  
Although I seek for it, the seventh  
door. . . .

THE NURSE (*trying the lock of the  
first door*)

Is this the key of the first? . . . Or this?  
. . . Or this?  
Not yet, not yet. . . . Ay, but the third  
goes in,  
Dragging my fingers after it! . . . Be-  
ware! . . .  
Fly! . . . The two panels both have  
come to life!  
They are gliding back like curtains! . . .  
What is this?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Beware, beware! . . . It is a hail of fire,  
That beats upon my hands, that wounds  
my face!

O!

*[The NURSE springs backward, for while she is speaking the two leaves of the door glide of their own motion into lateral recesses, and suddenly disappear, disclosing a vast heap of amethysts piled up to the top of the doorway. Then, as though delivered suddenly from centuries of constraint, countless gems and jewels of every size and form, but all of the one substance, amethyst—necklaces, bracelets, rings, aigrettes, buckles, girdles, collars, diadems—fall like a crumbling mass of violet flames, and rebound as far as the further side of the*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*hall ; and, while the first to fall spread themselves over the marble flags, others, more and more numerous and more and more resplendent, begin to fall from all the mouldings of the enchanted vaultings, and flow therefrom continually with an incessant sound of living jewels.*

THE NURSE (*fascinated, bewildered, gathering up jewels with both her hands*)

Gather them up, O stoop, gather them up!

Take the most beautiful! Enough are here

To glorify a kingdom! Still they fall!

They pierce my hair, they stone my hands!

O look!

Unheard-of gems are raining from the vaults,

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Miraculous violets, purple, lilac, mauve!  
Plunge your arms into them and hide your  
face,  
And I will fill my mantle full with them!

### ARDIANE

These amethysts are noble. Open now  
The second door.

### THE NURSE

The second? I dare not! . . .  
Yet I would know if . . .

*[She inserts the key in the lock of the  
second door.]*

O, beware, beware!  
The key already turns! And they have  
wings,  
The doors: the walls too tear themselves  
asunder!

O!

*[The scene is the same as on the  
opening of the first door, but*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*this time is seen the accumulated wealth, the rebounding irruption, the dazzling and musical fall of a blue rain of sapphires.*

ARDIANE

These are fine sapphires. Open now the third.

THE NURSE

Wait, wait until I see that I have here  
Indeed the most magnificent. My cloak  
Will break beneath the weight of blue,  
blue sky!

O see them overflow! on every hand  
They pour, pour, pour!—a violet torrent  
here,

And yonder in a stream of azure blue!

ARDIANE

Come, come, Nurse, quickly, for the  
chance to sin

Is rare and fugitive. . . .

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*opens the third door, when the same thing befalls, save that this time follows the pale invasion, the milky rush, of a deluge of pearls, a shower less heavy, but more illimitable than those preceding*)

I will but take  
A handful of them, so they may caress  
The sapphires.

ARDIANE

Open now the fourth door.

THE NURSE (*opens the fourth door, when as before there is a shower of jewels, but this time of emeralds*)

O, these are greener than the Spring that  
runs  
Along the poplars thick with drops of  
dew

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

That catch the lovely sunlight in my  
home!

*[Shaking her mantle, which over-  
flows with amethysts, sapphires,  
and pearls.]*

Away, away, ye others! give you place  
For the most beautiful — for I was  
born  
Under the boughs, and love the light of  
leaves.

### ARDIANE

Open the fifth door.

### THE NURSE

O, not even these?  
You do not love them?

### ARDIANE

What I love is fair  
Beyond all fairness of miraculous gems.



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE (*opening the fifth door, to set free a blinding irruption, a living incandescence, a sinister deluge and cascade of rubies*)

O, these are terrible : I will not touch !

ARDIANE

Now we approach the end : the threat lies here.

Open the sixth.

THE NURSE

It is the last key.

ARDIANE

Open it quickly.

[*The NURSE, hesitating, opens the sixth door. All passes as before : but the radiance is this time intolerable. Cataracts of enormous diamonds of the first*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*water pour into the hall; myriads of sparks, flashes, flecks of fire, and prismatic rays mingle, are extinguished, blaze forth again and multiply, outspreading as they fall. ARDIANE, startled, gives a dazed cry. She stoops, picks up a diadem, a necklace, and handfuls of the glistening splendour, and therewith she decks at random her hair, her arms, her throat, her hands. Then, flashing before her eyes and raising before her face diamonds that shed a brilliance upon her.*

O, my flashing diamonds!  
For you I never sought, but on my way  
I greet you! O immortal dew of light!  
Stream o'er my hands, illuminate my arms,  
Dazzle my very flesh! O, you are pure,  
And you are tireless, and you never die:

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

And that which in your fires eternally  
Trembles, like to a populace of spirits,  
That have constrained and wear the stars  
of Heaven,

It is the passion of that Radiance  
Which, penetrating all things, knows no  
rest,

And finds no more to conquer, save itself!

*[She approaches the door, and looks  
up at the vaulted arch.]*

Rain on, O supreme heart of summer,  
rain!

O shards of light, O limitless soul of flame!  
Yea, wound my eyes, yet shall you never  
tire

Those eyes of gazing!

*[Leaning yet further back.]*

O, what is it there?

O Nurse, where are you? For the  
splendid rain

Hangs motionless, suspended in a bow,  
A diamond rainbow of prismatic fire! . . .

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

O see the seventh door, with golden bars,  
With golden lock and hinges!

### THE NURSE

Come away!

No, never touch it! No, withdraw your  
hands!

Withdraw your eyes, lest of itself it open!

Come, let us hide! These diamonds—  
after them

Or fire will come, or death!

### ARDIANE

Go back, go back!

Hide you yourself behind a marble shaft:

I will alone go forward.

*[She steps into the recess under the vaulted doorway, and inserts the key in the lock. The door divides into two panels, and disappears: nothing is visible*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*save an opening full of darkness : but the sound of singing, muffled and remote, rises from the depths of the earth, and spreads through the hall.*

THE NURSE

Ardiane !

What are you doing ? Is it you that sings ?

ARDIANE

Listen !

THE DISTANT VOICES

Orlamonde's five daughters,  
When the faery died,  
Orlamonde's five daughters  
Sought to win outside.

THE NURSE

They are . . . the other women !

ARDIANE

Yes.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE NURSE

O, shut the door! Their singing fills  
the hall:

It will be heard, heard everywhere!

ARDIANE (*trying to close the door*)

I cannot!

### THE DISTANT VOICES

They lit their five lanterns,  
Through all the towers they sought,  
And in four hundred chambers;  
The day, they found it not.

### THE NURSE

Now it is louder, always louder! Come!  
Come, let us close—help me—the outer  
door. . . .

[*They try to close the door that con-  
cealed the diamonds.*]

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

This too resists! We cannot shut them  
in!

### THE DISTANT VOICES

Then they found an echoing deep,  
And let it them enfold :  
And upon a stubborn door  
Found a key of gold.

THE NURSE (*bewildered, and also entering  
the recess*)

Be silent, silent! . . . We shall all be  
lost!

Stifle that voice!

[*Stretching out her mantle.*

The doorway—ah, my cloak  
Will cover it. . . .

### ARDIANE

I see beyond the sill  
Steps. I am going down to where they  
sing.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE DISTANT VOICES (*always louder*).

Through the chinks they see the ocean :

Ah, they fear to die !

They strike the door they dare not open,

And the hours go by.

[*At the last words of the song BARBE BLEUE enters the hall. For a moment he stops short, gazing ; then he draws near to the women.*

BARBE BLEUE.

You too !

ARDIANE (*who starts, leaves the doorway, and advances, glittering with diamonds, towards BARBE BLEUE*)

I above all.

BARBE BLEUE

I thought that you  
Were stronger, wiser than your sisters were.



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

How long did they avoid the thing forbid ?

BARBE BLEUE

This, for some days ; that, a few months ;  
and one,  
The last of all, a year.

ARDIANE

It was the last,  
Only the last, that there was need to punish.

BARBE BLEUE

It was a very little thing to ask.

ARDIANE

You asked of these more than you ever  
gave.

BARBE BLEUE

The happiness I willed for you you lose.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

The happiness I would live not in darkness.

When I know all to pardon will be mine.

BARBE BLEUE (*seizing ARDIANE by the arm*)

Come! Come!

ARDIANE

Where would you, then, that I should go?

BARBE BLEUE

Where I shall lead you.

ARDIANE

No.

[BARBE BLEUE *strives to drag her away by force. She gives a long cry of pain. This cry is answered at first by a low*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*murmur from without. The struggle between the two continues for a few moments, and the NURSE gives vent to despairing outcries. Suddenly a stone, hurled from without, shatters one of the windows, and the crowd is heard, excited and enraged. Other stones fall; the NURSE, running to the great door at the end of the hall, raises the bars and shoots the bolts. A sudden rush from outside splinters the door and forces it in; and the peasants, infuriated but hesitating, crowd upon the threshold. BARBE BLEUE, releasing ARDIANE, draws his sword and prepares for the onset. But ARDIANE, tranquil, advances towards the crowd.*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### ARDIANE

What would you? He has not done me any ill.

*[She gently disperses the peasants, and carefully closes the door, while BARBE BLEUE, with lowered eyes, gazes at the point of his sword.]*

### CURTAIN

## ACT THE SECOND

*At the rising of the curtain the scene is a vast subterranean hall, with a vaulted roof supported by many columns ; it is plunged in almost total darkness. From the extreme right, almost in the wings, there runs back a narrow, winding subterranean passage, also with a vaulted roof ; it debouches into the great hall towards the front of the stage by a roughly-arched opening.*

*At the further end of this passage ARDIANE and the NURSE are seen, descending the last few steps of a stairway ; ARDIANE carries a lamp.*

THE NURSE

Hush ! Do you hear ? He shuts the iron door

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Over our heads! Why would you not  
give way?

We never shall behold the day again.

### ARDIANE

Fear not; he is wounded, he is overcome;  
But knows it not as yet. With supplication  
He will re-open it: but let us seek  
First if we cannot of ourselves win free.  
Meanwhile his wrath all that his love  
refused

Has granted: we shall find what here is hid.

*[She advances, holding the lamp high above her head, to the mouth of the passage, and there bends forward, seeking to penetrate the darkness of the hall. At the first ray of light which pierces the obscurity is heard the sound of hushed and fearful flight. ARDIANE turns towards the NURSE to call her.]*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Come! They are here!

*[She enters the hall which the lamp illuminates pillar by pillar.]*

Where are you?

*[A terrified moan replies. ARDIANE directs the rays of her lamp toward the part from which it seems to proceed, and perceives the forms of five women, motionless with fright, who are huddled together in the shadows of the remotest pillars.]*

ARDIANE *(in a muffled voice, still half fearful)*

They are there!

Nurse, nurse, where are you?

*[The NURSE hastens toward ARDIANE: ARDIANE gives her*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*the lamp, and takes a few  
hesitating steps toward the five.*

Sisters, O my sisters!

*[The five start.*

They live! They live! They live! Behold  
me here!

*[She runs to them with open arms,  
clasps them with hesitating  
hands, strains them to her  
breast, and kisses them and  
caresses them, feeling about her  
with uncertain gestures, in a  
kind of impassioned and con-  
vulsive tenderness, while the  
NURSE, lamp in hand, stands  
still a little apart.*

### ARDIANE

O, I have you! . . . They are full of life,  
They are full of sweetness! . . . When  
I saw the hall  
Open in darkness from the passage end,



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

I thought to find . . . ah me! . . . dead  
bodies here. . . .

And lo . . . I kiss these loveliest lips in  
tears!

Have you not suffered? O, your lips  
how fresh,

Your cheeks how like the cheeks of  
children! See,

Your naked arms are supple, ay, and  
warm;

Your round round breasts are throbbing  
through their veils!

Why do you tremble? . . . O, how  
many you are!

Now I clasp shoulders; now my arms  
entwine

Hips, and my touch on whom I know  
not rests. . . .

On every hand my lips meet lips, my  
breast meets breasts.

O this that bathes you all, this hair!

You must be fair, so fair!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Waves, faintly warm, are parted by my  
hands,

My arms are lost amid rebellious strands. . . .

Have you a thousand tresses? . . . and  
are they

Like night, or like the day?

I see no longer what I do,

But I am kissing, kissing all of you,

And one by one I gather all your hands!

It is the least of you I find the last :

O never tremble ! See, I hold you fast,

My arms enfold you close to me !

Nurse, nurse, what are you doing there ?

Behold me like a mother here,

Feeling in darkness, and my children . . .  
they

Await the dawn to clear.

*[The NURSE draws near, bearing the lamp, and its light falls on the group of women. The captives are then seen to be clad in rags, their hair in disorder, their*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*faces emaciated and their eyes dazzled and alarmed. ARDIANE, for a moment astonished, takes the lamp from the NURSE, in order the better to light them, and to regard them more closely.*

### ARDIANE

O, you have suffered here !  
And O, how gloomy does your prison  
    seem !  
Great clammy drops are falling on my  
    hands,  
And my lamp's flame is flickering all the  
    while !  
How strange your eyes are when you look  
    at me !  
And you draw back as I approach—but  
    why ?  
What, are you still afraid ?  
And who is that who seeks to fly ?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Is it not she, the youngest of you all,  
She that I kissed but now?  
O, has my long long sister's kiss  
Done to you any harm?  
Come to me, come then! Do you fear  
the light?  
Tell me, what is her name?

### TWO OR THREE TIMID VOICES

Selysette.

### ARDIANE

Selysette—a smile?  
It is the first that I have seen this while!  
Your wide eyes falter as though they saw  
the Dead,  
Although in truth they look on life in-  
stead:  
And O, these delicate bare arms that  
tremble,  
Both waiting to be loved! Come, my arms  
too

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Are waiting, though I tremble not as you!

[*Embracing her.*]

You have been in this tomb how many days?

SELYSETTE

We count the days but ill here, oftentimes  
Deceive ourselves, but none the less I think  
I have been here for upwards of a year.

[YGRAINE *advances: she is paler than  
the others.*]

ARDIANE

It is a long while since you saw the light!

YGRAINE

I used not to unclose my eyes; I wept  
So long alone.

SELYSETTE (*looking fixedly at ARDIANE*)

How beautiful you are!

How could he bring himself to punish you  
As he used us? You also in the end  
Have disobeyed him?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

No, it was not so !  
No, I obeyed more swiftly than the rest,  
But other laws than his.

SELYSETTE

Why have you come ?  
O why have you come here ?

ARDIANE

To set you free.

SELYSETTE

How should we be set free ?

ARDIANE

But follow me :  
No more than that. . . . What used you  
here to do ?

SELYSETTE

We prayed, sang, wept, and then we waited  
always.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

You never sought escape?

SELYSETTE

We could not flee,  
For all the ways are shut, and flight forbid.

ARDIANE

That we shall see. . . . But she that looks  
at me  
Between the tangles of her fallen hair  
That seems to wrap her round in frozen  
flame—  
What is her name?

SELYSETTE

Her name is Melisande.

ARDIANE

Come hither, Melisande! And she whose  
eyes,  
Wide, eager eyes, are following my lamp?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

Bellangere.

ARDIANE

And that other, who is hid  
Behind the heavy pillar?

SELYSETTE

She has come  
From very far away, poor Alladine!

ARDIANE

Why do you call her poor?

SELYSETTE

Because she came  
Last of us all, and speaks another tongue.

ARDIANE (*holding out her arms to*

ALLADINE)

Come, Alladine! . . . You see that I speak  
hers,  
When I embrace her thus.



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

She has not yet  
Ever ceased weeping.

ARDIANE (*looking at SELYSETTE and the  
others with astonishment*)

Why, but you yourself,  
Can you not laugh yet—laugh and clap  
your hands?

And all the rest are silent! What is this?  
What are you? Will you live in terror  
thus

Always? I do not see you smile at all,  
While with your eyes—incredulous eyes!  
—you watch

My every gesture. Will you not believe  
The joyful news? O, do you not regret  
The light of day, the birds among the  
boughs,  
The high green gardens blowing over-  
head?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Do you not know the world is in the  
Spring?

I yester-morning, wandering by the way,  
Drank in the light, the sense of space of  
dawn,

So many flowers beneath my every step,  
I knew not where to set my careless feet!  
Have you forgot the sunlight and the  
dew,

Dew in the leaves, and laughter of the  
sea?

The sea but now was laughing as it laughs  
On days whereon it knows the wind of  
joy,

And all its thousand ripples approved my  
feet,

Its ripples singing on the sands of light. . . .

*[At this moment one of the drops of  
water which drip incessantly  
from the roof falls upon the  
flame of the lamp which ARDI-  
ANE holds before her, as she*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*turns towards the mouth of the subterranean passage, and the light flickers and is extinguished. The NURSE gives a cry of terror, and ARDIANE stops, dismayed.*

ARDIANE (*in the darkness*)

O, but where are you?

SELYSETTE

Hither : take my hand.  
Stay by me : water, stagnant and profound,  
Lies yonder.

ARDIANE

What, and you can see it still?

SELYSETTE

Yes, we have lived so long in darkness  
here.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

BELLANGERE

Come hither : it is lighter here by far.

SELYSETTE

Yes, let us all go thither to the light.

ARDIANE

Then is there in this deepest darkness  
light ?

SELYSETTE

Yes, there is light. Do you not see it  
there,  
A wide, pale glow illumining the depth  
Beyond the further arches ?

ARDIANE

Where ?

SELYSETTE

O blind !

O, let me kiss you. . . .

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Yes, there is indeed  
A faint light, growing wider. . . .

SELYSETTE

O no, no!  
It is your eyes, your lovely astonished eyes  
That widen!

ARDIANE

O, whence is it?

MELISANDE

We do not know.

ARDIANE

But we must know!

*[She goes toward the back of the scene,  
and moves to and fro, feeling  
along the wall with her hands.]*

Here is the wall . . . and here . . .  
But higher . . . here . . . it is no longer  
stone!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Help me to mount upon this mass of  
rock!

*[She climbs, supported by the others.]*

Here it is like an altar. Here the roof  
Is moulded in a pointed arch. . . . And  
here—

O, O, enormous bolts and iron bars!  
You have sought to push them? Have  
you?

SELYSETTE

Never! No!

No, never touch them: for they say the  
sea

Washes the walls—great waves will  
tumble in!

It is the sea that makes it glimmer  
green!

YGRAINE

We have so often heard it: have a  
care!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

O, I see water tremble above our heads!

ARDIANE

No, no, it is the light that seeks you out!

BELLANGERE

She is trying to force it open!

*[The terrified women recoil, and take refuge behind a great column, whence they follow with widened eyes ARDIANE'S every movement.]*

ARDIANE

My poor sisters!

Why, if you love your darkness, do you seek

Deliverance from any quarter? Why, if you were happy, did you use to weep?

Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

O, the bars rise! They rise! And now  
the doors

Are going to open! Wait!

*[And indeed the heavy panels of a  
sort of great interior shutter are  
seen, while yet she is speaking,  
to open, but as yet only a very  
faint, diffused, and sombre light  
illuminates the round aperture  
perceived under the vaulted  
ceiling.]*

ARDIANE (*continuing her search*)

No light as yet,  
No real light! But now I pass  
My hands across. . . . What is it?  
Glass?  
Or maybe marble. . . . One would say  
This were a window, sealed away,  
Blackened with pitch. . . . My nails are  
broken! Nay,  
Where are your distaffs? Melisande,



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Selysette, give me in my hand  
A distaff: nay, a stone,  
A single pebble of the thousands strown  
Over the floor. . . .

[SELYSETTE runs to ARDIANE, holding  
up to her a stone, which she takes.

Behold before your eyes  
The key of your sunrise!

[She strikes a violent blow upon the  
glass. One of the square panes  
is shattered into fragments, and  
a great dazzling star seems to  
burst forth in the darkness.  
The women give a cry of  
almost delighted terror, and  
ARDIANE, now beside herself,  
and wholly submerged in a  
more and more intolerable  
radiance, breaks all the re-  
maining panes with heavy,  
hurried blows, in a kind of  
ecstatic delirium.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Yet another pane !

Now, and now again !

Till they fall, great and small, shattered,  
down to the last of all !

All the panes in ruin crack,

And O the flames are driving back

My hands, my hair !

I can see nothing now of what is  
there !

Nor do I longer dare

To raise my lids, for now it seems

They are mad with fury, the dazzling  
beams !

Stir not from where you were !

I can no longer stand upright,

But shut my eyes behold the sight

Of bright long strings of pearls, my eye-  
lids lashing !

I know not what assails me, o'er me  
dashing :

Is it the skies or else the seas,

Is it the light or else the breeze ?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

All my tresses bright have grown a torrent  
of light, ✦

And miracle all over me is flashing !

I see no longer, but I hear

A myriad rays of light beating on either  
ear !

But how to hide my eyes I do not know,  
For no shade now my two hands throw ;  
My eyelids dazzle me ; my arms, that  
try

To cover them, do cover, but with light !  
Where are you ? Hither, all of you !  
for I

Am helpless to descend ; I cannot see  
aright ;

I see not, know not, where to press  
My feet amid the surf of fire that sway  
my dress !

Come hither, hither all, or I shall fall  
Into your darkness !

[*At this cry SELYSETTE and MELI-  
SANDE leave the shadows where-*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*in they had taken refuge, and run to the window, their hands pressed upon their eyes, as though to pass through flame; and thus, groping in the light, they mount beside ARDIANE on the mass of rock. The others follow them, and do as they; and thus all crowd together in the stream of blinding radiance, which forces them to lower their heads. Then passes a moment of dazzled silence, during which is heard the murmur of the sea without, the caress of the wind among grasses, the song of birds, and the bells of a flock of sheep going by in a distant pasture.*

SELYSETTE

I can hear the sea!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And I can see the sky. . . .

*[Covering her eyes with the bend of  
her arm.]*

One cannot look !

ARDIANE

My eyes are growing calmer 'neath my  
hands.

Where are we ?

BELLANGERE

Trees are all that I would see.  
Where are they ?

YGRAINE

O, but how the world is green !

ARDIANE

We are midway upon the cliff-side here.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

Down there—the village! Do you see  
the village?

BELLANGERE

We cannot reach the village: all around  
Is water, and the bridges all up-drawn.

SELYSETTE

Where are there people?

MELISANDE

There is a peasant there —  
Yonder.

SELYSETTE

He saw—is looking at us now.  
See, I will make a sign to him. . . .

*[She waves her long hair.*

He saw!

He saw my hair, he takes his bonnet off!  
He makes the sign of the Cross!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

A bell, a bell! [*Counting the strokes.*  
Seven, eight, nine!

BELLANGERE

Ten . . . and eleven . . . twelve!

MELISANDE

So it is noon. . . .

YGRAINE

Who is it singing so?

MELISANDE

Why, those are birds! Do you see them?

There they are!

There are thousands in the lofty poplar  
trees

That grow along the river.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

Alladine!

Where is she, O where is she, Alladine?  
For I would kiss her.

MELISANDE

Alladine is here,

And I, I kiss her.

SELYSETTE

You—O Melisande,

You are so pale!

MELISANDE

You also, you are pale!

No, do not look at me!

SELYSETTE

And see, your dress

Is all in tatters: I can see you through  
it. . . .



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And yours; for your uncovered breasts  
appear,  
Parting your tresses. . . . Do not look at  
me.

BELLANGERE

How long our tresses are!

YGRAINE

How pale our cheeks!

BELLANGERE

The sun shines through our hands. . . .

MELISANDE

O, Alladine!

She is sobbing!

SELYSETTE

I am kissing, kissing her. . . .

ARDIANE

Ah yes, kiss one another: do not yet  
Look in each other's faces: more than all

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

You shall not think that light will make  
you sad.

You shall by your intoxication profit  
To issue from the tomb. Here steps of  
stone

Descend the cliff-side. Though I do not  
know

Whither they lead, yet they are full of  
light,

And the free winds of heaven assail them.

Come !

Follow me all ! A thousand thousand rays  
Are dancing, dancing on the crests of the  
sea !

*[She goes out through the opening  
and disappears in the light  
without.]*

•  
SELYSETTE (*who follows, drawing the  
others after her*)

Come, yes, O come, my poor, my happy  
sisters !

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Let us too dance, dance, dance the dance  
of the light !

*[They all climb the great stone and  
disappear, singing in the brilli-  
ance of outer day.]*

### THE RECEDING VOICES

Orlamonde's five daughters  
(The faery's days were o'er),  
Orlamonde's five daughters  
Found at last the door.

CURTAIN

## ACT THE THIRD

*The curtain rises on the same scene as in the First Act. The scattered jewels are still glistening in the niches, and on the marble floor. Between the pillars of the semi-circular colonnade are open coffers, overflowing with costly raiment. It is now night without, and under the hanging candelabra, the tapers of which are lit, ALLADINE, SELYSETTE, MELISANDE, YGRAINE and BELLANGERE are standing before the great mirrors, and each is giving the touches of completion to the dressing of her hair, or adjusting the folds of her glittering attire, or decking herself with jewels and flowers, while ARDIANE, passing*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*from one to the other, assists and advises them all. The great windows are open.*

### SELYSETTE

Though from the spell-bound castle we  
as yet

Discover no escape, yet wherefore fear,  
Since he is here no longer ?

[*Embracing* ARDIANE.

We are happy,  
And still, because you tarry with us, free.

### MELISANDE

Where has he gone ?

### ARDIANE

I know no more than you.  
Yet gone he has. It may be he is troubled :  
It may be for the first time disconcerted.  
It well may be the anger of the peasants

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Left him uneasy ; he has felt their hate  
Brim over : who shall say he has not gone  
To search out guards or soldiers to chastise  
The mutinous, and so return a master ?

MELISANDE

You will not go away ?

ARDIANE

How should I go,  
When all the castle moats are brimming  
full,  
When all the drawbridges are hoisted high,  
When all the doors and gates are locked  
and barred,  
When all the walls are inaccessible ?  
Though none are seen to guard them,  
none the less  
The doors are not abandoned ; all our steps  
Are closely spied ; he must have given out  
Mysterious orders. But on every side

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

The peasants wait and watch upon the  
roads.

Meanwhile, my sisters, the eventful hour  
Draws nigh ; we must be very beautiful.  
But is it so that you prepare yourselves ?  
Your hair was full of miracle, Melisande !  
Below, it lit the darkness of the vaults,  
Steadfast it smiled upon the night of the  
tomb,

And now you have extinguished every  
flame !

Again I come to liberate the light !

*[She removes MELISANDE'S veil,  
cuts with her scissors the fillets  
that constrain her tresses, and  
all her hair suddenly flows  
downwards, streaming resplen-  
dent over her shoulders.]*

YGRAINE (*turning about to look at  
MELISANDE*)

O !

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE (*also turning*)

I can hardly think it still is she !  
She is so beautiful !

ARDIANE

And you, and you !  
Those loveliest arms, where are they, Sely-  
sette ?  
What have you done ?

SELYSETTE

Within my silver sleeves,  
Here are my arms.

ARDIANE

I cannot see them, no,  
Not as I saw them but a while ago,  
Saw those arms I worshipped so,  
The while I watched you, saw you dress,  
Every strand and every tress ;  
They seemed as they were raised above



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Your head to reach, to appeal for love.  
My loving eyes caressed your every gesture :  
I turned about, and when I turn again  
I see their shadow merely through their  
    vesture  
That shone but now so bright. But now  
    these twain  
Twin rays of happiness I liberate !  
    *[She detaches the sleeves.]*

### SELYSETTE

My poor bare arms ! O, they will shake  
    with cold !

### ARDIANE

No, for they are too beautiful ! And  
    you,  
    *[Turning to YGRAINE.]*  
Ygraine, where are you ? For there shone  
    but now,  
Deep in this mirror, shoulders, and a  
    throat,

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

That flooded it with happy, tender  
light :

Come, I must liberate you all! My  
sisters,

In truth I do not wonder any more  
He never loved you as he should have  
loved,

Or that he coveted a hundred, yet  
Possessed no woman.

*[Removing the mantle that YGRAINE  
has thrown over her shoulders.*

O two fountain-heads  
Of beauty into darkness cast away!  
This above all: fear nothing! And  
to-night

Let us be beautiful!

. *[The NURSE, haggard and dishevelled,  
enters by a side door.*

THE NURSE

O, he is here!

He is returning!

## Ardiane and 'Barbe Bleue

THE OTHERS

Who? Who? He? To-night?

ARDIANE

Who told you?

SELYSETTE

Were you able to go out?

ARDIANE

Have you seen any one?

THE NURSE

Yes, yes, a guard!

He has seen you, he admires you!

ARDIANE

I have seen

No creature since the hour he went away.

All gates, all doors of their own motion  
close,

Though none knows how; the palace  
seems deserted.

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE NURSE

They hide, I say they hide,  
And we are all espied  
Forever here.

It was the youngest spoke to me ;  
He is returning ; he must be,  
He said, quite near.

The peasants are in arms. The peasants  
know !

They are rising ! All the village is below,  
Lurking among the hedges ! Hark ! A  
cry !

*[She mounts by one of the curving  
lateral stairways to the win-  
dows of the gallery.]*

There are torches in the copses going by !

*[The women, terrified, give a cry of  
horror, and run to and fro  
through the hall, seeking a  
point of exit. The NURSE en-  
deavours to stop them.]*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE NURSE

Seek not to fly: you know the doors are  
shut.

Where would you go? Stay here, stay  
here, and wait!

SELYSETTE (*also mounting to the windows*)

O, the great chariot! It is stopping!

*[All mount the stairs to the windows,  
crowding together on the in-  
terior balcony, and leaning out  
into the night.]*

### MELISANDE

See!

Now he steps out! I see him! And he  
makes

Signs, signs of anger!

### SELYSETTE

All around him stand  
His negroes!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

And they all have naked swords  
That glitter in the moon !

SELYSETTE (*taking refuge in ARDIANE'S  
arms*)

O Ardiane !  
O Ardiane, I am frightened !

THE NURSE

Do you see ?  
The peasants are appearing ! There they  
come !  
See, there again ! And O, they have their  
scythes,  
Their pitch-forks !

SELYSETTE

They are going to fight !  
[*Murmurs, cries, uproar, tumult,  
blasphemy, and the clashing of  
arms in the distance without.*]

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

They fight!

YGRAINE

One of the negroes there has fallen!

THE NURSE

O,  
The peasants, they are terrible! Their  
scythes!

They are so huge! And all the village  
there!

MELISANDE

O look, the negroes are deserting him!  
They fly, they fly! They are hiding in  
the woods!

YGRAINE

And he is flying also! Now he runs!  
Now he is making for the castle court!

THE NURSE

The peasants after him!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

O, they will kill him!

THE NURSE

They are going out to help him! See  
the guards!

They have opened wide the castle gates!

They run!

They run to help him!

SELYSETTE

One, two, three, four, five . . .

Now six . . . now seven. . . . There  
are only seven!

THE NURSE

O look, the peasants are surrounding  
them!

They are there in hundreds!

MELISANDE

O, what are they doing?



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

THE NURSE

I see them dancing round about a man :  
The rest have fallen !

SELYSETTE

And the man is he !  
I caught a sight of his blue mantle  
then :  
He is lying on the grass !

THE NURSE

Now they are still !  
Now they are raising him !

MELISANDE

O, is he hurt ?

YGRAINE

He staggers !

SELYSETTE

He is bleeding ! I saw blood !  
Ardiane !

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Come away then, look no more!  
Hide your head here in my arms!

THE NURSE

They are bringing ropes!  
They are disputing! Now they tie his  
limbs!

MELISANDE

Where are they going? For they carry  
him. . . .  
They are dancing, they are singing!

THE NURSE

Hither, see!  
They are coming hither: see them on the  
bridge!  
The gates are open. They are halting. O,  
They mean to cast him in the moat!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE AND THE OTHERS (*terrified,  
crying aloud, and rocking to and fro  
in desperation at the windows*)

No, no!

Help, help him! Do not kill him!

Help him, help!

No, no, not that! Not that! Not that!

Not that!

### THE NURSE

They do not hear. . . . The others  
thrust them on. . . .

### ARDIANE

He is saved!

### THE NURSE

And now they are before the gate,  
And now they seek to break into the  
yard!

[*Cries from the CROWD, who have  
caught sight of the women at  
the windows. They then sing.*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE CROWD

Open! Open! Open! Open the door!

Open wide the door!

Open in God's name!

The candle gutters o'er,

The wick has no more flame!

### THE WOMEN

We cannot! . . . It is barred! . . . They  
break it in!

Hear it give way! They all are coming  
in!

And now they struggle up the flight of  
steps

Before the door below. . . . Beware!  
Beware!

They are all drunken!

### ARDIANE

I am going now  
To unbar the door below. . . .

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE OTHERS

O Ardiane! [*Terrified and imploring.*  
No! They are drunken! Bolt it, Ardiane!  
They are at the door!

### ARDIANE

Fear nothing: stay you there.  
Do not come down, for I will go alone.

[*The five women descend the stairs which lead down from the windows, and recoil towards the nearer end of the hall, and there remain, grouped rigidly together in an attitude of terrified attention. ARDIANE, followed by the NURSE, goes to the great central door, under the colonnade, and throws back both leaves of it. There is a sound of trampling feet, of shouting, singing, and laughter. The*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*foremost members of the crowd appear, amid the red glare of the torches, as it were framed in the doorway, which they entirely fill, but without crossing the threshold. They are folk of brutal appearance, savage or hilarious according to disposition; their clothes are torn and disordered after their struggle. They are carrying BARBE BLEUE, who is tightly pinioned, and pause for a moment, disconcerted at the appearance of ARDIANE, who is standing before them grave, unperturbed, and imperial. At the same time, further back among those peasants who are crowded together on the flight of steps, and cannot see what is passing, there are cries, sudden*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*thrusters and pushes, shouts, and laughter that lasts a moment and is then extinguished by the perplexed and respectful whisperings of those about the door. At the moment of the invasion of the doorway by the crowd, the five women silently and instinctively fall on their knees at the end of the hall remoter from the door.*

AN OLD PEASANT (*removing his bonnet and rolling it in his hands*) .

Well, lady, can a man come in ?

ONE OF THOSE THAT CARRY BARBE BLEUE

You see,  
He'll do you no more ill !

A THIRD PEASANT

He's heavy. . . . Ouf!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

### THE FIRST PEASANT

Where would you have us put him?

### ANOTHER PEASANT

Over there  
Down in the corner.

*[They lay BARBE BLEUE down.*

There now, there he lies!  
Now he will never stir again! No more!  
Much evil has he done us!

### ANOTHER PEASANT

Have you got  
Somewhat to kill him with?

### ARDIANE

Yes, never fear. . . .

### THE PEASANT

Will you have some one help you?



• Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

No, no need. . . .

We shall do well.

A PEASANT

But look you have a care :  
Beware lest he escape you !

[*Baring his chest.*

See you now,  
What he has done to me !

ANOTHER PEASANT (*baring his arm*)

Now see my arm !  
It came in here, and then out there it  
went.

ARDIANE

You are all brave folk, but do you leave  
us now.

We shall avenge ourselves, and well ; but  
now

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

Leave us, I pray, for night is growing  
late,

And see to all your wounds.

### THE OLD PEASANT

Now show respect,  
Because we are not savages, to ladies.  
We shall not make a sound. . . . It is not,  
lady,  
Words, merely—but you are too beautiful.  
Good-bye, good-bye.

ARDIANE (*closing the door*)

Good-bye; you have my thanks.  
[*She turns and sees the five  
women on their knees at the  
other end of the hall.*

You were on your knees!

[*Approaching* BARBE BLEUE.  
And you are wounded? Yes!  
The blood is flowing here—'tis in the  
neck—

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

'Tis nothing ; no, the wound is shallow.

This,

Here on the arm—but hurts upon the  
arm

Are seldom very grave—but as for  
this—

The bleeding will not stop : the hand is  
pierced.

First we must dress it.

*[While ARDIANE is speaking the  
five women draw nigh, one  
by one, and without speaking  
kneel or lean about BARBE  
BLEUE.*

SELYSETTE

His eyes are open: ~~now~~

MELISANDE

How pale he is ! He must have suffered !

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE

O!

Those peasants are so terrible!

ARDIANE

Some water!

THE NURSE

Yes, I will go and seek some. . . .

ARDIANE

Have you linen?

MELISANDE

Here is my kerchief.

SELYSETTE \*

He is stifling! O,  
Would you not have me hold his head up?

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

See, I will help you. Stay,

SELYSETTE

No, for Alladine  
Is helping me.

[*ALLADINE indeed is helping her to raise BARBE BLEUE'S head, and she furtively kisses his forehead, sobbing the while.*]

MELISANDE

O softly, Alladine!  
What are you doing?

SELYSETTE

How his forehead burns!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

MELISANDE

His beard is shaven, and he is not now  
So terrible. . . .

SELYSETTE

Have you not some water? See,  
His face is covered all with dust and  
blood.

YGRAINE

He breathes with effort. . . .

ARDIANE

Yes, it is these cords,  
They stifle him. The bonds are drawn  
so tight  
A rock would crumble in them. . . .  
Have you not,  
Some one, a knife?

## Ardiane and Barbe Blue

YGRAINE

Two knives were on the table. . . .  
Here is the larger.

*[She gives it to ARDIANE.]*

THE NURSE (*who has returned with the  
water—terrified*)

You are going to . . .

ARDIANE

Yes.

THE NURSE

But he is not—you see . . . he looks at  
us!

ARDIANE

Raise well the cord, so I may do no  
hurt. . . .

*[One by one she cuts the bonds which  
imprison BARBE BLEUE. When*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*she comes to those that pinion  
his arms behind his back the  
NURSE seizes her hands to check  
her.*

### THE NURSE

Wait till he speaks . . . we do not know  
at all . . .

### ARDIANE

Have you another knife? This blade  
is broken. . . .

The cords are very hard.

MELISANDE (*giving her the knife*)

Here is the other.

### ARDIANE

Thank you!

*[She cuts the last turns of the cord.  
Silence: the beating of their*



## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

*hearts is heard. BARBE BLEUE, feeling himself free, rises slowly to a sitting posture, his arms still benumbed, and moves his hands to make them supple. He then regards each of the women about him fixedly, and in silence. Then, leaning against the wall, he stands upright and remains motionless, looking at his injured hand.*

ARDIANE (*drawing near to him*)

Good-bye.

[*She kisses him upon the brow. BARBE BLEUE makes an instinctive movement to detain her. She gently frees herself, and proceeds toward the door, followed by the NURSE.*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

SELYSETTE (*running after her and  
stopping her*)

Ardiane, Ardiane!  
Where are you going ?

ARDIANE

Far away from here,  
Down yonder, where I am awaited still. . . .  
Do you come with me, Selysette ?

SELYSETTE

I too?  
But when will you return ?

ARDIANE

I shall not.

MELISANDE

Ardiane !

O!

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE

Are you coming, Melisande?

[MELISANDE *looks to and fro from*  
ARDIANE *to BARBE BLEUE and*  
*does not reply.*

O see the open door, the far blue hills!

Ygraine, are you not coming?

[YGRAINE *does not turn her head.*

Now the moon,  
The stars, illumine every road. And you,  
Bellangere, do you come?

BELLANGERE (*shortly*)

No. . . .

ARDIANE

Alladine,

Do I go forth alone?

[*At these words ALLADINE runs to*  
ARDIANE, *throws herself into*  
*her arms, sobbing convulsively,*  
*and holds her in a long and*  
*feverish embrace.*

## Ardiane and Barbe Bleue

ARDIANE (*embracing her in turn, and softly disengaging herself, in tears*)

You too remain,  
Alladine! O be happy! And farewell. . . .

*[She goes out hastily, followed by the NURSE. The five women look at one another and at BARBE BLEUE, who slowly raises his head. BELLANGERE and YGRAINE shrug their shoulders, and go to close the door. Silence.]*

## THE CURTAIN FALLS

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