

**THE PRINCESS  
AND  
THE GARGOYLE**

*A Fairy Tale*

**Mireille Pavane**

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**Warning:**

This story includes brief descriptions and scenes of violence, battles and torture which may be unsuitable for young or unsupervised children.

## Synopsis

*On the morning of the wedding of Princess Beatrice of the kingdom of Trasimene to the south of the brooding shadow of the Black Mountain, news was brought to the royal court that the feared one-eyed beast had broken free of his imprisonment and was rampaging through the land towards Trasimene. The beast was coming for Princess Beatrice, it was said, to avenge the loss of his right eye and the jewel she had stolen three years ago from the lair of the beasts in the Black Mountain.*

*But not all is as it seems in this fairy tale adventure about friendship and kindness, courage and honour, and the battles won by things other than superior numbers and might.*

*Can one recalcitrant princess save the kingdom of Trasimene from the evil at its gates?*

To my friends (who may or may not have been tipsy) and their delightful offspring,  
especially my goddaughter, L.

And to my parents, for the kaleidoscope of stories which filled my childhood.

Ogni alba a il suo tramonto.  
(Every dawn to its dusk.)  
—Gabriele d'Annunzio

Stars, hide your fires;  
Let not light see my black and deep desires.  
—Macbeth, William Shakespeare

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## The Wedding Day of Princess Beatrice

On the morning of the wedding of Princess Beatrice of the kingdom of Trasimene to the south of the brooding shadow of the Black Mountain, news was brought to the royal court that the feared one-eyed beast had broken free of his imprisonment and was rampaging through the land towards Trasimene.

No village had been safe from the beast. He passed through like a terrible whirlwind leaving terror and destruction, scorched earth and smoke behind in his wake. The neighbouring kingdom of Ossaia, home to the princess' betrothed, Crown Prince Xavier, had had its grain stores, fields and the vanguard of knights sent to meet the beast decimated.

The beast was coming for Princess Beatrice, it was said, to avenge the loss of his right eye and the jewel she had stolen three years ago from the lair of the beasts in the Black Mountain.

King Theobald declared that the kingdom of Trasimene would stand and defend itself and the surrounding lands from any foe or nemesis.

Prince Xavier vowed that he would meet the beast in battle and slay him.

The courtiers, the noble lords and ladies and common folk all cheered, reassured that the combined might of two armies led by their king and his future son-in-law would vanquish the fearsome beast.

The princess, the youngest and the only surviving one of King Theobald's three daughters, said nothing. She took off her wedding veil and sent her handmaidens away.

When her betrothed expressed surprise at her gesture, she declared that she would marry the victor when the battle was over. Believing that this would double his triumph, the prince was satisfied and went to prepare for battle.

The king's subjects saw the wisdom of their princess' gesture, believing that it would encourage and strengthen the unity of the two kingdoms' armies against the beast.

King Theobald was an indulgent father and it surprised no one that the king did not question or contest his daughter's decision.

'He has come, father,' said the princess.

'Do not be foolish, Beatrice,' said the king. 'I am in no mood to lose any more daughters. Do not stray from the castle.'

'Yes, father,' said the princess.

Talk of the approaching battle drowned out the talk of the postponed royal wedding. The kingdom busied itself in preparations for the impending battle and fortifying its defences against attack. The sentries on the capital's watch towers were vigilant in scanning the surrounding countryside for signs of the one-eyed beast threatening the kingdom and the life of their much beloved princess.

Princess Beatrice went to join the king and his counsellors and generals at the council of war, but Prince Xavier and his advisers had been invited to the joint council and the prince was displeased by her presence. The king's counsellors and the generals who had fought alongside the royal family through many campaigns sought to intercede for her.

'But you cannot desire to confront the beast, my love,' said Prince Xavier to the princess. 'The vengeful monster seeks your destruction.'

The princess graciously acquiesced to the prince's wish.

'The council would do well to listen carefully to Prince Xavier's views on military matters,' said the princess before she withdrew. 'He has vast experience in waging war.'

'Do not stray from the castle,' said the king.

'Yes, father,' said the princess.

While King Theobald was a fond father, he knew the character of his youngest child, and the princess was confined to the castle grounds under the watch of additional guards assigned to her protection by order of the king.

Princess Beatrice wandered around the castle, trailing from casement to casement, looking out on the business of her people in the capital and to the empty horizon.

'I shall go light some candles and pray for victory,' said the princess to her handmaidens and guards as night began to fall.

The handmaidens and guards moved to follow her.

'I shall not need you,' said the princess.

'But princess,' protested the handmaidens.

'His Majesty's orders,' protested the guards.

'I shall light the candles in my royal chambers,' said the princess. 'I have no further need of any of you this evening.'

'But your Highness,' said a stubborn guard.

'Very well, you may stay,' said the princess.

She dismissed the other guards and handmaidens and sent them away.

The princess went to pick up some tapers from atop an armoire lying next to a small ornate casket in her chambers.

'Oh dear,' said the princess. 'It appears that my wedding jewels have not been returned to the royal treasury.'

'I am at your service, your Highness,' said the guard.

'I shall visit the Keeper of the Crown Jewels myself,' said the princess, picking up the casket.

When the princess arrived at the royal treasury, the Keeper of the Crown Jewels came out to greet her.

'Good evening, Clotaire,' said the princess.

'Welcome, your Highness,' said Master Clotaire.

The princess' lone guard was left to keep watch outside, joining the treasury guards standing on each side of the iron reinforced oaken doors.

'I have come to return my wedding jewels,' said the princess, handing the small casket to the Keeper of the Crown Jewels.

'This casket is empty, your Highness,' said Master Clotaire.

'So it is,' said the princess. 'Let me run back to my royal chambers to fetch the jewels. May I use the secret passage?'

'His Majesty's orders, your Highness,' protested Master Clotaire.

'I shall tell the guards outside that we have many matters to discuss regarding the design of my new crown, and that no one is to disturb us,' said the princess.

'Your Highness,' protested Master Clotaire.

Princess Beatrice moved to the inner chamber of the treasury and drew apart a corner of the great tapestry, depicting the hunt of a unicorn, which hung over its north facing wall.

'Your Highness,' sighed Master Clotaire as he handed a long hooded velvet cloak, a curved short-sword fashioned in the shape of a seahorse with a jewel-encrusted hilt, and a silver holder with a lit taper to the princess.

'You are a good friend, Clotaire,' said the princess.

She pressed a concealed panel in the wall and vanished like a glow-worm into the darkness.

The princess followed the secret passage crossing from the royal treasury to the next wing, emerging out of a corresponding hidden panel in the royal library. She crossed the vast, deserted floor of the royal library in pools of moonlight. She passed the shelves of ancient volumes and

scrolls and artefacts, ignoring the library's doors opening to the Lord Chamberlain's wing, the northern ramparts, the throne room, and the inner courtyard. She chose instead the door opening onto a corridor leading via the night stairwell and kitchen servants' quarters to the walled vegetable garden. As she moved through the corridor, the princess extinguished the taper and clung to the shadows, taking care to avoid and hide from the servants passing by. She slipped out at the base of the stairwell and through the vegetable garden, drawing up her hood and keeping to the perimeters, until she reached the door at the end of the garden wall opening to the ancient stone cloisters connecting the castle to the abbey. It was an easy, familiar journey to the abbey gates in the shadows of the cloisters, guided by moonlight, avoiding sight by the sentinels on the watch towers.

The princess rang the bell at the abbey's postern gate. Presently, the peephole hatch in the wooden door slid open and a nun's face appeared.

'The night is dark. I have lost my way. I seek sanctuary,' said the princess.

She drew her hood back slightly to reveal her face to the gatekeeper.

'Please wait here,' said the nun.

The hatch closed. The princess waited. Presently, footsteps returned, followed by the sound of bolts being drawn, then the wooden gate door opened.

'The Reverend Mother wishes to see you, Sister Beatrice,' said the nun. 'I am Sister Eleanor. Please follow me.'

The nun led the princess through the lane, down the central cloister, through the main church doors, past the font, down the nave, turning into the transept and to the vestry where an elderly abbess stood.

'My child,' said the Mother Superior.

'I am sorry to trouble you again, Reverend Mother,' said the princess.

'These are dangerous times, Your father, the king, has placed sentries to guard the abbey too,' said the abbess.

'Oh,' said the princess.

'Your father cares for your safety,' said the abbess.

'There are more important things at stake than my safety,' replied the princess.

'You must follow your conscience, my child,' said the abbess. 'Sister Eleanor will take you to the churchyard. You know your way from there. But be careful. Have you anything with which to defend yourself should the need arise?'

Princess Beatrice nodded and drew out the sheathed short-sword given to her by Master Clotaire.

'Then, bless you, my child. Hurry—and hurry back,' said the abbess.

The princess left the vestry and followed Sister Eleanor, returning to the south transept, passing the sacristy and cloister and a series of indoor chapels, past the cellarium and kitchen, through a quadrangle with a stone wellhead surrounded by rose and herb gardens, through several interconnecting cloisters, skirting the refractory and the eight-sided fountain which stood at the intersection of two walkways, following a path down past the hospice lawn, over a little stone bridge, through another gate and into the walled churchyard. The nun handed a brass key to the princess and retraced her steps into the abbey.

The princess put the key in her pocket and crossed the churchyard. She climbed past the brambles and overgrown vines, past neglected headstones and rosebushes, and descended the stone steps to the rear churchyard gate. She spat on the key and put it in the rusty lock and turned it without a creak. The gate opened. She stepped out into the clearing and looked around.

The abbey stood on the edge of a dense forest. In the moonlight, the forest looked mysterious and was eerily silent and still.

Princess Beatrice drew the curved short-sword out from its sheath, grasping it tightly in her hand.

A shadow stepped out from the darkness of the forest, immense in height and form and appendage and unfurled wingspan, adamant in the moonlight, like stone.

'Beatrice,' said the shadow.

It was the one-eyed beast of the Black Mountain.

\*\*\*END OF EXCERPT\*\*\*