

“Blue Beard's One-Hundredth Wife”

This was before battered women's shelters,
before serial killers were called serial killers,
before divorce, even before handguns.
Blue Beard's one-hundredth wife found his dead ninety-nine others
stored in a forbidden room. Some said he tired of a woman
once her mystery faded. Others thought
he was too quick to temper. He went on
long business trips before there were business trips,
trying perhaps to curb his domestic violence.
His beard was blue before punk rock was fashionable,
which manipulated some women into feeling bad for him.
They stroked his speckled mustache-his navy bristles
and his soft gray hairs, which grew in aqua.
He curled into their breasts, playing sensitive,
his big rough hands stroking the backs of their necks.
In a week or two a wedding, in another month
she'd drop a dish or smell up the outhouse
and it was all over. No one ever found his weapon.
Certain forensic specialists guessed he used his bare hands,
pulling his wives apart as though they were roasted chickens.
Luckily for them, this was before magic was obsolete
and Blue Beard's one-hundredth wife knew how to sew.
When she found that pile of dead wife parts
she pieced them together like Butterick patterns
and took to arms and heads with a needle and thread.
After two afternoons of nonstop work,
the women breathed again, all perfectly proportioned.
Some said, “Thank you, I've always wanted red hair.”
Or, “Wow! I wondered what it was like to have big breasts!”
Blue Beard's one-hundredth wife sewed the light eyes
to the light skin, the small ankles on the small legs.
This was before plastic surgery, this was before women's magazines,
before body doubles were used in movies. Yet here were ninety-nine

untouchable pinups, their creator a Plain Jane
with a good eye for detail. When Blue Beard came home
his grief shook the stained glass windows of his castle.
He tried to kill his one-hundredth wife,
using the excuse of her entrance into the forbidden room,
but his ninety-nine exes pushed him out his heavy oak front door.
This was before lawyers, but the one hundred wives still got the house.