

**An extract from *Mr Fox*, retold by Colin Ward (traditional folktale)**

Lady Mary looked down the long, thin, dark corridor and felt the chilling breeze. However, she wasn't going to let that get the better of her curiosity, so she began to walk, step by step by step, past the faintly lit candles on the wall. As she reached the end of the corridor, she saw a small door, above which was written:

'Be bold, be bold, but not too bold, lest you heart's blood may run cold.'

Lady Mary thought this was even more strange than the words over the gate and the front door to Mr Fox's castle. Nevertheless, being the curious young woman she was, Lady Mary reached for the handle, gave it a gentle twist and pushed the door open. After a moment had passed and her eyes could see, Lady Mary found herself looking at the most terrible of sights. The room was filled with the bodies of several beautiful women, all dead, all bloodied – all murdered by her husband-to-be.

Lady Mary was shocked, terrified and upset. She turned and ran as fast as she could, down the long, thin, dark corridor and right to the spiral stairs. Just as she reached the top of the stairs she looked out of the window that overlooked the cobblestone courtyard, and who did she see? Mr Fox! He was returning from his 'business trip', dragging a beautiful woman behind him. She was kicking and screaming with pain and fear while Mr Fox smiled an evil smile.

Lady Mary panicked and ran down the stairs as fast as she could and rushed to the front door. Just as she opened it she saw Mr Fox already climbing the steps to the front door, dragging the poor woman behind. Lady Mary panicked and hid behind one of the great pillars in the hallway just as the door swung open.

Mr Fox hurled the woman into the hallway, smiling and laughing. The young woman screamed as Mr Fox grabbed her wrist, trying to tear the wedding ring from her finger. But it wouldn't move – not an inch. Mr Fox's smile turned to anger and he grasped his sword, swung it high in the air and brought it smashing down on to the girl's wrist, slicing the hand clean off. The girl's hand was flung up into the air, flew across the hall, and found its landing place in the worst possible place: Lady Mary's lap. Lady Mary held back her scream, her face painted with terror. Mr Fox was furious as he smashed and bashed his way around the hall in search of the hand. He tried the bookcase, the chair, the grandfather clock, but with no luck. Finally he moved over to the pillar. He reached his hand round and he was but an inch from Lady Mary's face when the young woman on the floor groaned in pain. Mr Fox decided to leave the hand for the evening and find it in the morning. He picked up the girl and took her to the room at the end of the corridor.

When the coast was clear, Lady Mary slipped out of the castle. For some reason, she took the young woman's hand with her.

**End of Extract**