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BLUEBEARD

Once upon a time, there was a very rich man who lived in a large and beautiful house. He had elegant furniture, wide gardens, horses, chests full of treasure, and many valuable things. But even though he had all that, there was something about him that made people feel afraid. His beard was a dark blue color, and his appearance was so strange that many people preferred to stay away from him.

That man was known as Bluebeard. He wanted to get married, but no young woman in the area wished to do so. Some thought he was too serious, others did not trust him, and many felt afraid

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without really knowing why. Besides, people said that he had already had other wives, but no one knew for sure what had happened to them.

Near his house lived a widow with two daughters. The two young women were very different from each other. One was more reserved, and the other was curious and observant. Bluebeard began to visit the family and invited them many times to walk through his gardens, eat in his great house, and enjoy parties with music and plenty of food.

For several days, the house was full of guests, laughter, and outings. There were sweets, fruits, lights, stories, and games. Little by little, the younger daughter began to think that Bluebeard did not seem as frightening as people said. She saw him as attentive, generous, and always willing to please.

After some time, Bluebeard asked her to marry him.

At first, the young woman hesitated, because his blue beard still seemed strange to her, but in the end she accepted. She thought that perhaps people had exaggerated and that he was not as terrible as he appeared.

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A few weeks passed, and one day Bluebeard told her that he had to go on a trip for important business.

Before leaving, he took out a large ring of keys and handed it to his wife.

—Here are the keys to the whole house —he said—. With this one, you can open the great halls. With this one, the silver chests. With this other one, the cupboards where I keep my valuable things. You may also enter the rooms upstairs and walk through any of the corridors you wish.

The young woman listened carefully while taking the keys.

Then Bluebeard lifted a small and slender key.

—But this key opens a little room at the end of the far corridor —he said in a serious voice—. I forbid you to go in there. You may visit everything else, but you must not open that place for any reason in the world.

The young woman felt a slight shiver.

—All right —she answered—. I will do as you ask.

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Bluebeard was silent for a few seconds, looked at her closely, and then left on his journey.

As soon as he was gone, some friends and relatives came to visit the young woman. Everyone wanted to see the house from the inside. They walked through the halls, admired the mirrors, the curtains, the chests, the furniture, and the paintings. Bluebeard's wife smiled, but deep inside she could not stop thinking about the little key.

The more she tried to forget it, the more curious she became.

—What could be inside that little room? —she asked herself again and again.

She went up the stairs, walked through the corridor, and came to the door at the far end. She stood still for a few moments, with her heart beating very fast.

—I will only look for a moment —she whispered—. Then I will close the door, and no one will know.

Trembling, she put the key into the lock and slowly opened the door.

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At first, she could not see well, because the room was dark. But when her eyes got used to it, she discovered something dreadful. On the floor and on the walls were terrible signs showing that Bluebeard's former wives had once been there. Then she understood with horror that they had disappeared because he had harmed them.

The young woman let out a scream and dropped the key. She was so frightened that she could hardly breathe. She slammed the door shut and ran down the corridor.

Back in her room, she looked at the key and saw that it had a red stain on it. She tried to clean it with a cloth. Then she washed it with water. After that, she rubbed it with soap, ashes, and powder. But the stain would not disappear.

The more she tried to remove it, the more desperate she became.

—What am I going to do now? —she said in fear—. If Bluebeard finds out, he will know that I disobeyed him.

And in fact, Bluebeard returned earlier than expected.

As soon as he entered the house, he called his wife and asked for the keys.

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The young woman tried to seem calm, although her hands were shaking.

Bluebeard looked at them one by one, until he saw the small key.

—Why does it have this stain? —he asked in a cold voice.

The young woman felt her face grow pale.

—I... I do not know —she answered softly.

Bluebeard looked at her harshly.

—Yes, you do know —he said—. You went into the room that I forbade you to open.

The young woman began to cry.

—Forgive me —she begged—. I let curiosity guide me. It will never happen again.

But Bluebeard was furious.

—You must pay for disobeying me —he said in a terrible voice—. Your turn has come.

The young woman fell to her knees, trembling with fear.

—Please, give me a little time to pray and say goodbye —she said.

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Bluebeard agreed, but warned her:

—Do not take long.

The wife quickly ran up to her room. There she called to her sister, who was in the house.

—Sister —she said desperately—, look out the window and see if our brothers are coming. Tell them to hurry, please.

Her sister ran to look.

—I still do not see anyone —she answered.

Downstairs, Bluebeard shouted:

—Come down at once!

The young woman answered in a broken voice:

—One more moment, please.

Her sister looked again into the distance.

—They are still not coming —she said.

Time seemed to pass very slowly. The young woman cried and walked from one side of the room to the other, while Bluebeard called for her with more and more anger.

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—Come down right now! —he roared.

The young woman asked again:

—Sister, do you see anything?

This time, her sister opened her eyes wide.

—Yes! —she cried—. I see our brothers. They are riding as fast as they can.

At that very moment, Bluebeard came up the stairs in a rage. He seized his wife forcefully and raised his hand to punish her. But just then, a loud blow was heard at the door.

The brothers rushed into the house and arrived in time to save their sister. When they saw what was happening, they confronted Bluebeard and managed to stop him before he could harm her.

The young woman, crying with relief, ran to embrace her brothers and her sister. She was safe.

In time, Bluebeard's wife inherited all his riches. She used part of them to help her family, another part to support those who had protected her, and she tried to live in a calmer and wiser way.

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After everything that had happened, she never forgot that experience. She understood that some people hide great dangers behind a kind appearance, and that warnings sometimes exist for a reason.

And so, this story reminds us that curiosity without caution can bring trouble, but also that listening to our instincts and being careful with what seems too strange can help us avoid great danger.

THE END

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