

The Green Ribbon: A Retelling

At the very edge of the deep, dark woods there was a little blue house with white windows. In that little house there lived a little boy. He was a curious child. He was always running from the little blue house with white windows into the deep, dark woods to watch and chase and catch the creatures that flew and crept and crawled. He was always coming back to that little blue house with white windows, eyes full of birds and hands full of the beetles and butterflies to put in his boxes. After a while of running and searching and finding, he had many boxes of wonderful beetles and butterflies, but there was only him to admire them. He began to think what a big house the little house with the white windows was without a friend. The little house felt quite big and lonely because his parents were off doing what parents do, and they had no interest in his birds and beetles and butterflies. After a while, he began to think how lovely it would be to have somebody to run around in the deep, dark woods with. He began to think this thought day after day, and run after run. Then, one day, looking at his beautiful beetles and butterflies in their boxes, he looked up and out the window to the little green house next door. What should he see but a little girl! Staring right back at him. He was so surprised he nearly lost his head! She waved back through her white window in the green house.

She was dressed in a white shirt with a green ribbon tied around her neck. She leaned out her window and he his. She said, seeing the box in his hands, in a voice like the birds that flitted in the deep dark woods, *look*, and pulled out from behind her back a box that was filled with beetles and butterflies too. And so they became the best of friends. Each morning they would lean out the window and whisper *good morning*, then sneak off into the deep dark woods to play.

They found the fastest streams and the rarest birds and the biggest beetles and the flutteriest butterflies. They made the most wonderful world of their own in the deep dark woods with its deep, dark creatures.

One day, when they were playing together in the deep, dark woods, the little boy became curious about the green ribbon tied around the little girl's neck. Not a day went by, since the first day he had seen her through the white window in her little green house, that she hadn't worn the ribbon. It was the same green as the shadowy leaves in the deep dark woods, that grew by the fast streams and the same shine of the beetle wings as they caught the light. When she was turned around, looking for a butterfly that was fluttering in the shadowy leaves of green. His hand reached out to the little girl's neck to the green ribbon. He was so quiet and so still, that he was sure she wouldn't realize. Just one touch. His finger had just brushed the silk of the ribbon, and she quickly turned with fiery eyes. *If you want us to stay friends, you will never ask me about the green ribbon.* The little boy, because he liked having a friend to run in the deep, dark woods with, withdrew his hand and looked down ashamed.

And so the little boy and the little girl grew up together, their lives happy and burbling like the fast stream they rushed over in the deep, dark woods. The hours grew into days, the days to weeks, and the weeks to years. They both grew into strong and kind people. One day, they both realized they didn't have any more time to run and play together in the deep, dark woods, they realized they had to go off to learn more things in different places, to teach others about birds and beetles and butterflies, to do what parents do. They realized too, that even without the deep, dark woods, they both couldn't imagine their lives without each other. So they found their

own new little green house by a new woods that was just as deep and just as dark as the one they left behind, and they were happy.

The little boy, who was now a man, loved his wife very much. She was the sun that woke him in the morning and the moon at night. But even though all of her, wonderful and kind, was enough to fill his days with contentment and love, he still had a question that remained unanswered at night. Even after all these days, weeks, and years. Even after she had changed heights and names and forests, she still wore the same green ribbon around her neck. So he asked her about it again. She turned with a sad look this time. *If you want us to be together, don't ask about my green ribbon.* So he kissed her cheek, and she went back to washing dishes in their little blue house and tried to forget about the green ribbon as he dried the dishes next to her. The two of them together, in their little, wonderful life in their little green house.

For a while, forgetting worked. They had their wonderful life. But the question, it grew and grew and grew in the man's mind. Scuttling around like a beetle. Chirping like a bird. Chasing like a butterfly. He tried to slow the scuttle, silence the chirp, put down his net, because she was his sun and moon, but he was still that little boy who ran around in the deep dark woods, who watched and chased and caught. There was a question that the green ribbon asked hour after hour, day after day, year after year. It swelled up with claws and wings and antennae, until everything he saw was green, the trees, the stars, the dishes and doors. Everything became the same curious shade of the green ribbon. He decided he had to know. He had to know what it was. What it meant, What was beneath it? It was just a ribbon after all, and she was just his lovely wife. She would tell him, if she loved him. If she loved him enough and completely. So one night when his lovely wife was asleep and the moon shone through the little window in their little

green house, it was shining and shining and shining on the green ribbon. He couldn't sleep anymore, the moon was green, the room was green, the leaves on the wind were so very very green. He would be so quiet and so still this time. She wouldn't realize this time. Just one pull. He just had to know. Now! He couldn't wait until morning. He couldn't wait another hour, another minute, another second and *so*, he reached over and untied the green ribbon around his lovely wife's neck.

It unfurled, quiet and still. It fell to the pillow. The ribbon was the color green of shadows and moons and beetle wings. Underneath the ribbon, was nothing at all. He was quiet and still. She slept still. He looked closer. There was nothing to put in his box. It was only his lovely wife sleeping, quiet and still. Under the green ribbon was just her neck, unbroken, beautiful, whole. He shouldn't believe it. He wouldn't believe it. After all these days and weeks and years. Not knowing. After all this waiting, and chasing. Not knowing. He couldn't believe that the question she had never answered didn't have an answer. There was no beetle to put in a box. Didn't need an answer. He was angry, *so angry*, he turned green. There was no butterfly to catch. He was no longer still and quiet. He ran fast and angry like the stream. He rushed like the leaves in the branches in the deep, dark woods in a storm. The lovely wife opened her eyes, not moving an inch in waking. Her eyes were fiery and sad, her voice was like a bird flying away. One hand went to her neck, and she whispered, *my love, what have you done?* She reached for him, to be together, raising herself up, but a line appeared in her lovely neck. Blood began to seep and drip and gush from the line deep and dark on her lovely neck. It ran fast and dark and deep. Her head rolled to the floor of their little green house, to the edge of the window and the woods, eyes still open, staring, whispering, *my love, what have you done!*