

The vibrant meadow stretched endlessly before them. The blanket of red, yellow and pink flowers swayed in the afternoon breeze, stirring up the scent of sweet pollen. "Gather flowers for Grandma's birthday," her mother's request replayed in Ella's mind. "Any colour is fine, be back before dark." But Ella knew that her Grandma adored purple flowers. The kind that did not grow in the meadow, but could perhaps be found in the woods. She looked over at her little brother George, who was chasing a dragonfly, his bucket hat bouncing with every step. Maisy was clutching a small woven basket with both hands, her precious Mr. Teddy nestled inside. Ella headed towards the opening into the woods with her siblings toddling along beside her. "Don't worry," she reassured "We'll be quick."

All they had ^{to do}
~~was~~

'Gather flowers for Grandma. It was such a simple task.

Maisy reached up with her sweaty palm to hold her sister's hand.

"What if there are wolves?" her voice trembled.

"There are no wolves," Ella said, trying to sound confident.

Dead leaves crunched like potato chips under their feet as they trudged deeper and deeper into the woods.

Soon, they were at the stream. The cooling sound of trickling water ignited the children's thirst. Ella was helping George across the stream when she ~~saw~~ ^{spotted} a dark figure lurking among the shadows. There was something there - somebody. An old man emerged from behind a tree, his gnarled hand clutching a flickering lantern. His pale face was weathered and creased and was partially concealed by an unruly beard. He grinned ever so slightly. "What are you children doing out here all alone?"

The sun tiptoed towards the horizon, casting long shadows on the ground.

"We're gathering flowers," Ella ^{responded} ~~said~~ hesitantly.

"Purple ones, for grandma!" George excitedly added.

The stranger's voice dropped to an almost inaudible whisper "Perfect."

He blew out the flame in his lantern and placed it on the ground.

The old man reached into his dusty, dirt-coloured satchel and feverally searched for something. He pulled out a single flower. The lavender-coloured petals shimmered like a thousand diamonds. It was the most beautiful flower the children had ever seen.

"I know a place," the man enticed "where they grow in millions."

Maisy gasped, "I have to see that!"

"Me too!" exclaimed George.

The enchanting flower danced like a ballerina in the chilly wind.

Ella hated to admit it, but she wanted to see it, too.

The man walked at the front, followed closely by George who was skipping and humming a joyful tune. They had been walking down the unfamiliar path for quite a while now, and Ella noticed the sun was now nothing but a semicircular lamp, resting on the horizon, threatening to sink even lower and disappear. The first stars in the sky glowed dimly like hundreds of eyes, blinking, watching, waiting.

Ella was about to say that they should be heading home soon when the old man suddenly broke the silence.

"We're here," the stranger sang in a monotonous, almost creepy voice.

It sounded more threatening than inviting, like a warning.

An old, rickety shed stood silently among the trees. The walls and roof were painted with moss and ivy, as if nature was trying to reclaim it. The man unclipped the chains that crossed over the door like an 'X'. A rusted key stabbed the lock, and with a click the door unlocked and ~~cracked~~^{cracked} open. He ushered the children inside like a perfect gentleman.

"I heard a howl!" shrieked Maisy, her eyes wide with terror. "The wolves are coming!"

"Don't worry," the man said with an empty chuckle, "The wolves can't get you in here."

The door was eased shut behind them. Once again, the lock clicked. ^{They were} trapped
"Hey! Let us out!" yelled George ^{while hammering} banging on the door. The sound
of footsteps ^{gradually grew} seemed to grow quieter and the man seemed to be getting
further away. Ella noticed a faint tapping sound. It could have been
the ticking of clock hands, ^{but} ^{there was nothing on any wall or on the floor} except the room was empty except for an
inconspicuous trap door in the far corner. The tapping grew louder,
and was no longer coming from one place. The floor rumbled and it
was ^{now} apparent that the banging noises ^{were} were coming from below.

The children huddled together in the corner, terrified. Ella's eyes
flickered to the trap door; what - or who was down there? Suddenly, the
door they had entered through unlocked and creaked open, and
the man entered. They screamed but the sound was swallowed
by the yawning darkness.

Outside, the woods were calm, almost peaceful, and the shed stood
as it always had - a silent, unassuming structure hiding a
tragic secret.

All they had to do was gather flowers for grandma. It was such
a simple task.