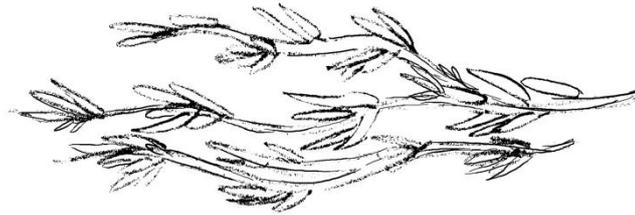


A Walk In Nunnery Wood



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November 1st 1851. Eleven-year-old Hannah started to cough in the cold air and she rubbed her hands together to keep warm. She had just finished work as a servant girl in Friar Street and was standing beside the iron gates of Worcester Gaol. She shivered at the memory of the prisoner who had walked past her the last time she had waited outside the gates.

“He’s been found guilty of his crimes and condemned to death,” said the man who was guarding the prisoner. “He’s just come back from church to confess his sins for the final time.”

She remembered how the man looked at her with frightened, soulless eyes. It was something Hannah would never forget. Moments later, the memory of the prisoner was broken by the sight of her mother who appeared from around the corner.

“Your father has gone missing,” she said. “You need to go into the forest and tell your grandmother. She might even be able to help with



that cough of yours.”

Hannah had never been into Nunnery Wood on her own before. Even so, after making the long walk from the city centre, she went into the darkness of the forest. She stopped at the sound of crunching snow and a feeling that someone was behind her.

“Who’s there?”

She didn't receive a reply. Instead, a cold wind slipped through the branches. She felt pain in her chest and grabbed hold of her red pneumonia jacket as tightly as she could. A black crow flew past, its wings creating finger-like shadows in the moonlight. Hannah followed its flight to the branches of a tree and gasped at what appeared to be a group of faces amongst the gloom. One of them was wearing a hood. Even so, Hannah was certain she could see a pair of frightened, soulless eyes staring directly towards her.



“It’s the prisoner,” she cried. “He’s come back from the dead!”

Hannah started to run. Faster, faster until she tripped on a hidden root and fell into the snow. As she wiped the ice from her face, a hand rested on her shoulder and Hannah flinched.

“What are you doing out here?” her grandmother said. “It’s freezing.”

As the snow began to fall, the pair of them made their way towards a cottage where swirls of smoke drifted from the chimney. Once inside, Hannah noticed a jar full of leeches on the table and a wooden box. As she walked towards the fire, the pain in her chest returned and she started to cough once again.

“Let’s see what we have in here,” her grandmother said, lifting the brown box from the table.

Hannah ignored her and looked towards the window of the cottage, the memory of what happened in the forest returning. “We need to lock the door. We need to do it now!”

“But why?” her grandmother asked.

“There’s a dead man in the forest. He’s following me!”

“Dead man? Are you sure?” her grandmother said, as she placed



the palm of her hand against Hannah’s forehead. “A temperature won’t help with those visions, but aniseed might.”

“Visions?” Hannah asked.

“It’s when people see things that aren’t really there.”

The door to the cottage opened with a creak. A man wearing a hood stepped inside the room and Hannah fell to the floor. She peaked out from underneath the table to see a pair of muddied boots walking towards her.

“He’s here,” she shouted, and closed her hands over her face. “He’s come to get me!”

“Don’t be frightened child,” her grandmother said. “You should know who this is.”

Hannah slowly lifted her hands from her face to see her father’s friendly brown eyes looking back. “But mother said you’d gone missing.”

“It took me longer than I thought to find these,” her father replied, placing some herbs on the table. “Do you know what this is?”

Hannah looked down at the plant. It had a pungent smell she recognised from the garden in summer. “Is it a sage leaf?”

“Well done child,” her grandmother said, “and some thyme as well. Perfect.”

As the effects of the herbs began to soothe her chest, Hannah started to undo the top buttons of her jacket.

“The red of your coat is perfect for a frightened girl being chased in the forest,” her father said. “Especially one who is looking for their grandmother.”

“I don’t understand.”

“All we’d need is a wolf and it would be just like the fairy-tale,”



her grandmother replied.

Hannah nodded, and smiled. It was the happiest she'd felt for as



long as she could remember.

Can you work out which one of these pictures is Sage and which one is Thyme?

Which fairy tale do you think the grandmother is talking about?