

Red

"Don't stray from the path!"

Skipping through the forest, Red, so named because of her favourite cloak, recognised the familiar smell of the lush flowers that she passed every week. The stone-laid path wandered through tall, telescopic trees, forming a canopy of serenity.

Red stopped to pick a handful of the gently nodding daffodils that flanked the path to her grandmother's house. As she crouched, a gentle breeze filled her nostrils with a waft of unfamiliar perfume.

'What is that?' Red pondered.

Staring inquisitively towards the undergrowth, her mother's words echoed meaninglessly, yet continuously, around in her head: "Don't stray from the path!" But why should she always listen to her mother? Surely one look couldn't hurt, could it? Overcome with curiosity, Red stepped from the path.

Parting the emerald leaves, Red's eyes sparkled with excitement. In front of her, handfuls of pink confetti drifted down from the boughs of majestic cherry trees; joyous birdsong twittered above her; harmonising the melodic humming of the bees. She could feel her heart racing in anticipation and wondered what other treasures lay beyond the path. In the distance, a lake of dancing primroses enticed her further in; her mother's words were now lost.

Deeper and deeper Red walked, transfixed by the exquisite offerings of the forest. Deeper and deeper she walked, unaware of the world changing around her. Deeper and deeper she walked, until nothing was recognisable. The trees, once a canopy of serenity, now formed foreboding tunnels, suppressing all life in their thorny grasp. The forest floor, once a blazing carpet of confetti, was now a complex maze of brambles and thorns, tearing at Red's vulnerable ankles. The birdsong had stopped; the silence was deafening.

All of a sudden, Red felt like something or someone was watching her; she sensed its presence. An uncontrollable shiver ran down her spine as she realised that she was not alone. What was it?

Panicking, she spun around, hoping to find the path - but it was too late. Red's breathing quickened; her heart hammered against her chest as terror bubbled in her throat. Panic immediately seized her in a spiral of darkness as a sinister shadow grew through the trees. Two malevolent eyes ... the stench of rotten breath ... a spine-chilling howl ...

"Don't stray from the path!" How foolish she had been.