

All twisty like a skipping rope, the path. Bare feet on smooth stones and crack-snackling twigs. A girl with a squirming secret. Good worms eat her up.

A gift, Gran said. Important. If Gran says something's Important, it is. Not like words in scribbly books or the things her mum and dad say.

A new toy to play with?

A ring of her own?

*No and No and No more guesses. Gran's wrinkles all join up in a smile. Something for your very own in my treasure box. Where Father Oak lives.*

Across the bridge, and the girl t e e t e r s on its high stone walls, pathdust warm and crunchy on her feet. She leaps with a breath, falls like a fish

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*Why'd you leave it there, Gran?*

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*To make it worth having.*

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Up, corkwards, to break the surface with a gladdened scream. Oozy mudprints peel from her feet as she shiver-hops between sunlit patches on the river's wide bank.

The path exhales into a long-grassed field. On the hill beyond, Father Oak holds up the sky with his crown. It's achy-warm climbing but she doesn't stop.

Here it is. Gran's initials on the open lid. But it's empty, broken in half. Just dirt inside, no treasure. All that's growing is a dandelion clock. Big and white

and round as the moon.

Up close, it's made of frailty.

Held together by nothing.

It's a wonder it can be at all.

She stares at it forever as birds sing above. Then draws in her deepest, most serious breath and blows. Seeds scatter like angels into the valley. Away they go, like fragile time.

*"Come with us," they say "And rest in the soft earth,"*

And somewhere deep inside them,

buried like treasure,

A wish