

The Door



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Introduction

If you discovered a strange door in your house, what would you do?

What if the door was locked and people told you never to go in there?

Could there be a person kept in the room against their will?

The Door

They found it while playing hide and seek in their grandmother's house.

"Granny is no longer with us," Mum had said.

Peter wasn't quite sure what that meant. Perhaps Granny had gone to the big room where old people sat at tables and marked crosses on pieces of paper.

He had gone there with her once. It had been terribly boring, although an old man had given him a sherbet bonbon.

Now Mum was upstairs, sorting through Granny's things, and Peter was hiding from his little sister, Gemma.

He had chosen the basement because Gemma was frightened of it. Peter was frightened too, but he would never admit that.

He waited on the bottom step for what seemed like ages. Gemma didn't come. She didn't even open the basement door.

At last he climbed halfway up and heard her talking to Mum in the kitchen.

"Gemma!" he called.

The door opened a crack. Gemma peered down at him, her bright

blue eyes framed by blonde curls.

“I’m not going down there,” she said. “There’s spiders. And a big snake.”

Peter glanced behind him. A snake would be brilliant. His friend Darren said snakes ate mice and sometimes even cats.

Granny had owned a cat, but Mum said it had gone away too.

Then Peter noticed something he hadn’t seen before.

Behind a stack of suitcases and cardboard boxes, a wooden frame rose from the basement wall. He could just make out the top hinge.

A door.

“Gemma,” he whispered. “Come and look at this.”

She shook her head. “There’s spiders.”

“I chased them away,” Peter lied. “They’ve all gone outside.”

“You’d better not be lying. I’ll tell Mum.”

“There’s another door down here. A secret one.”

Gemma leaned forward, gripping the frame of the basement doorway. Peter pointed into the shadows.

When she finally spotted it, her face lit up.

“Maybe it goes to the Magic Garden,” she said. “Where Iffy and Bang live.”

Peter had no idea who Iffy and Bang were. They were probably characters from one of her silly books. But he didn't want to open the door alone, and having Gemma beside him would make it easier.

"Maybe," he said. "Come on. Let's find out."

Gemma took one cautious step down. The stairs were steep, even for Peter.

He climbed back up, took her hand and helped her down.

A gust of wind blew through the cracked basement window. The door at the top of the stairs swung shut with a creak.

Gemma stopped.

"It's all right," Peter said. "We can go back up whenever we want."

The single bulb in the ceiling cast a weak yellow light over the room. Old furniture stood beneath dusty sheets. The air smelled of damp cardboard and something stale that Peter couldn't identify.

"Granny never liked us coming down here," Gemma said.

Peter remembered that. Whenever he had asked what was in the basement, Granny had told him it was full of rubbish and nothing worth seeing.

He looked at the hidden door again.

“Help me move these.”

Together they pushed aside the smaller boxes. Peter dragged a heavy suitcase across the floor. Its wheels squealed, making Gemma jump.

“Sophie says the Magic Garden only opens for Wanderers,” she said.

“Who are Wanderers?”

“I don’t know. But Sophie does.”

Peter wasn’t listening. They had cleared enough space for him to stand in front of the door. It was old, with peeling varnish and a dark brass handle.

He turned the handle.

Nothing happened.

He pulled harder, then put his shoulder against the wood. The door didn’t move.

“It’s locked,” he said.

Gemma looked disappointed. “Maybe we’re not Wanderers.”

Peter was about to give up when she pointed at the wall.

“What’s that?”

A brass key hung from a nail, almost hidden behind a strip of

loose wallpaper.

Peter took it down. The metal felt cold in his palm.

He pushed it into the lock and turned it. There was a heavy clunk.

For a moment, neither child moved.

Then Peter turned the handle and pulled.

The door opened slowly.

Beyond it lay a room without windows. Light from the basement stretched across the floor, revealing a narrow bed in one corner.

It looked more like a cot. A thin blanket lay crumpled at its foot.

Peter leaned forward.

Something moved on the other side of the room.

At first he thought it was another pile of old clothes.

Then it lifted its head.

A woman sat against the wall. She was naked, covered in dirt and so thin that Peter could see her ribs. A chain ran from a metal ring around her neck to a bolt in the wall.

She stared at the children, her eyes widening.

“Help me,” she said.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Where does the story take place?

Who are the characters in the story?

Where does Peter think his grandmother went?

What did the old man give Peter?

What is mum doing?

Why is Peter in the basement?

Does Gemma like the basement?

Can you describe Gemma?

What does Gemma think is in the basement?

What did Peter's friend say about snakes?

What happened to Gran's cat?

What does Peter see in the basement?

How does Peter encourage Gemma to come down into the basement?

What does Gemma think is behind the door in the basement?

What does Peter think is behind the door?

Can you describe the stairs in the basement?

What is in front of the door?

What does Gemma's friend say about The Magic Garden?

Is the door open or locked?

Where is the key?

What does Peter see first in the room behind the door?

What is the second thing he sees?

Essential Vocabulary

hide	reprimanded	box
seek	creaked	light
house	wanderers	door
granny	varnish	spider
mum	rotated	stairs
basement	clunk	ceiling
snake	frustration	key
cot	naked	lock
bed	deathly	chain

Exercise

There may be a lot of new or unfamiliar vocabulary to you in the story. This is the perfect time to get to know these new and strange words and phrases.

Write down all the new words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in a dictionary or online and write down the meaning next to the word or phrase.

It should look something like this:

Hide and Seek – *a popular game for children, where one person*

counts to ten, and the other children hide. Then the person counting has to find the others.

Grandmother – *an elderly relative. Either the father's mother or the mother's mother.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

The kids played hide and seek in the forest until the sun went down.

I used to visit my grandmother often when we all lived in London.

If you do this correctly, it will help you learn many new words and phrases. This will build your English vocabulary and writing down all the words and phrases, and making sentences of your own, will all help you to remember all of this new vocabulary.

Discussion Questions

What do you think of this story?

In your own words, describe what happened.

How old do you think Gemma and Peter are in the story? What makes you think this?

What do you think has happened to Peter and Gemma's grandmother? Where is she?

The story describes a big room where Peter went with his grandmother.

What is this place?

And what game are they playing there?

What do you think has happened to Peter's grandmother?

Where is she?

Why is Peter's mother in the grandmother's home?

What is she doing there?

Have you ever heard stories of people being kidnapped before?

Of people being kept in a basement?

What happened to these people?

Did they escape? If so, how?

What happens to people when they get old in your country?

Do their children look after them?

Or do they go to an old people's home?

Do you think old people like to be in an old people's home?

Why/why not?

We Gotta Get Out Of Here!

This is a group activity.

Divide into groups of THREE or FOUR students.

The Situation

You have all been kidnapped by a crazy man.

He has put you all in the basement of his house and you are locked in.

No one can see you but the crazy man.

No one can hear you.

You are kept in different rooms at night.

But for a very short time, he has left you altogether.

You use this time to plan your escape!

Together, in your group, make a plan to get out of the basement.

Make sure your plan has clear and easy-to-follow steps.

When you are ready, present your plan to the rest of the class.

Your classmates and teacher can then ask you questions about your plan and you must answer clearly.

Debate

This is a debate activity.

Divide the class into two groups of equal number.

Choose one person to act as chairperson. The chairperson must ensure there is order during the debate and that each person has the chance to speak.

Should Old People Live in Old People's Homes?

Team A

You believe that old people should not live in old people's homes.

You think old people's homes are inhumane and cruel. The standards of the homes are very low and often the residents are abused or not treated well.

Old people's homes only exist to make money. They do not care for old people at all.

You believe that looking after old people is the sole responsibility of the children.

They must take equal care of their parents when they get old. And if they do not take any care, then laws should be put in place to make sure they do take responsibility.

Ban all old people's homes immediately!

And force children to look after their parents when they get old!

Team B

You think that old people's homes are great places for old people to live.

The homes take great care of old people and all the residents are about the same age — so they can talk to each other about common interests.

The old people are cared for and fed well.

Plus, their children do not always have time to look after their parents when they get older.

They have jobs to do plus they have to look after their own children.

People just don't have the time.

And old people don't want to live in a house with kids running around all day.

They want some peace and quiet during the day.

In your groups, discuss all the things you need to say in the debate.

Make sure you have strong lines of argument to say in the debate.

When you are all ready — begin the debate!

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

In this writing exercise, you are going to continue the story from where it left off.

Peter has seen the old woman in the basement.

Who is she?

And what does Peter do next?

What does the woman do or say?

And what does Peter's mother do?

Write your story and then read it out loud in class.

Ask your classmates and teacher for feedback.

Credits

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