

The Map in the Floorboards

In the quiet town of Alderwick, nestled between two rolling hills and a patch of stubborn woodland, lived twelve-year-old Nora Ellis. She was the kind of girl who kept broken watches in a shoebox, convinced that one day she'd fix them all. Her curiosity had a habit of dragging her places adults forgot about—like the soot-caked attic above the library, or the stone culvert behind the bakery where frogs held court.

One rainy Saturday, Nora was forced indoors while her parents argued over replacing the creaking floorboards in the living room. They'd talked about it for years, but now, with the storm pressing down on the roof, her father finally pried the boards loose.

"Don't step here," he warned, lifting a warped plank with a groan. "Rotten through. Could snap under your foot."

But Nora didn't hear him. She was too focused on what lay beneath.

There, wedged under the joists, was a metal cylinder—dull grey and capped like a scroll case. She reached for it without thinking.

"What's that?" her father asked, wiping his hands on his jeans.

"I don't know," she murmured. "It was just... there."

He frowned, took it from her hands, turned it over, then handed it back. "Well, you found it. Might as well open it."

Inside was a rolled sheet of yellowed parchment, dry but intact. Unfurling it revealed a hand-drawn map, marked with looping rivers, forest symbols, and a red 'X' near something labelled "Ash Tree Hollow." The handwriting was old-fashioned, curling and ornate. But what caught Nora's eye was the note scribbled along the edge:

"To whoever finds this, follow the trail. What's buried is not gold, but something far rarer. —R.E., 1894."

"R.E.," she repeated. "Ellis... like us."

Her father looked startled. "Could be a coincidence. Or maybe some distant relative." He shrugged. "Probably just some kid's fantasy map."

But Nora wasn't so sure.

That night, she couldn't sleep. She traced the map under the glow of her desk lamp, comparing it to an old hiking guide of Alderwick Forest she'd found online. "Ash Tree Hollow" matched a clearing half a mile into the woods behind their house.

By morning, the rain had stopped. The air was soft and earthy, still smelling of wet bark and moss. Nora packed a flashlight, a trowel, and two peanut butter sandwiches, then slipped out before her parents noticed.

The forest was quiet, save for the occasional chirp of birds and the snapping of twigs beneath her boots. She followed the winding creek from the map, passed the hollow stump shaped like a heart, and finally stood before a massive ash tree, its gnarled roots stretching like fingers across the clearing.

The red 'X' marked a spot just left of the trunk. Nora dropped to her knees and began to dig.

Ten minutes passed. Then twenty. Her fingers were raw, and she was ready to give up—when her trowel struck something solid.

A small wooden box, bound in leather, rose from the earth like a secret exhaled.

Inside wasn't gold, but a leather-bound journal. Its pages, surprisingly well-preserved, were filled with notes, sketches, and thoughts penned in neat cursive by someone named Rebecca Ellis.

Nora sat back on her heels and flipped through it. Rebecca had lived in Alderwick in the late 1800s, and the journal told of her explorations, inventions, and musings on nature, curiosity, and the joy of asking questions no one else thought to ask. She'd buried the journal, she wrote, in hopes that one day someone like her would find it.

Nora read the last line out loud: *"To the future discoverer: May you never stop wondering."*

She closed the journal and hugged it close.

Back home, she cleaned the mud from its cover and showed her parents. Her father stared for a long time before smiling faintly. "Maybe R.E. wasn't just some kid after all."

From that day, Nora carried the journal with her wherever she went. It wasn't treasure, not the kind in fairy tales, but in its pages she found a kindred spirit—a reminder that the world was still full of hidden corners and mysteries waiting to be unearthed.

And she was just getting started.