

*The Deep
of the World*



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Nadia Niven

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For Emily



Once upon a time, in a land with rolling hills and high plateaus, there lived a girl, and her name was Gloria. Gloria and her aunt lived in a cozy cottage at the edge of the forest. Gloria's favourite activity was to sit by an old tree stump and think about her mother. She did this every day.

One day, Gloria's little old aunty grew very ill. Gloria had to stay inside with her all the time. She made soups, and opened the windows, but little old aunty didn't get better. She made rice, and closed the windows, but this didn't help either.

Gloria didn't know what to do. Just as she was about to open the door to ask her neighbour for help, there was a knock at the door. Not a polite knock, or a hasty knock, or even a timid knock. It was a strange 'rat-ta-ta-tat-rat' knock that meant "I am only knocking once, and if you don't answer, you'll always regret it." It was a salesperson's knock, in fact. If Gloria had recognized

it, things might have turned out very differently. But she didn't.

Gloria answered the door. "Good afternoon, dear," said the man at the door.

"Good afternoon," said Gloria hesitantly. She didn't want to be rude, but she had never seen so many colours in one outfit, and she couldn't help staring just a little bit.

"I hear your dear old aunty has been ill, child," said the man restlessly, rubbing his hands together.

"Yes," said Gloria, unsurprised. Everyone in the village had heard that by now, and although many neighbours had dropped by to help, there was nothing anyone could do.

"I've got a special medicine," said the man, glancing around furtively.

Gloria hesitated. Should she find out more? But the man didn't give her time to think. He pulled out a yellow bag. "Three gold pieces," he said, "and your dear old aunty will be cured."

"Three gold pieces?," Gloria asked, with a sinking heart. "I don't have that much money."

The little man didn't seem disappointed at all. He seemed happy, even excited, which Gloria thought was strange.

"No problem dearie, no problem at all," he exclaimed quickly. "Everyone here tells me you take very good care of your aunt. I'd like to help. Instead of three pieces of gold, why don't you give me...oh...three strands of your long hair?"

Now, Gloria had very long brown hair, which she put up on top of her head every morning. It seemed like a strange request, but Gloria was so worried about her dear old aunty that she didn't wait. She took down her long hair, and cut three long strands with a little knife she always kept in her pocket. Gloria's hair sparkled and shimmered in the sunlight. It seemed as long and as wonderful as the world. "Here," said Gloria, giving the man three long strands of her luminous hair.

"Here," said the man, giving Gloria the yellow bag of medicine. "Remember to stir it thirty-three times, and to let it boil for three whole days," cautioned the man.

"I'll remember," Gloria said quietly, wondering if she had made the right decision. She suddenly missed her hair.

"Well," said the man, "I'm sure I'll see you again."

"Goodbye, and thank-you," said Gloria, already forgetting him in her eagerness to prepare the medicine. She didn't even close the door.



For three days and three nights, Gloria boiled the medicine. She stirred it thirty-three times. Then she fed it to her little old aunty, and waited. The medicine made her home smell like the deep forest, like the sharp of winter, like the wind in the rain. Gloria breathed in the smell deeply, and sighed, thinking unaccountably of her mother.

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