

Beyond the Woods

by Aslı Karataş

Daphne was fast asleep behind the thick curtains in her room, yet the sunlight managed to slip between them and annoy her eyelids. She turned her head away. “Why do we have to live in this mountain village?” She had lived here all eleven years of her life—and it seemed like forever.

Daphne got out of bed and parted the curtains. What was the point of fighting the sun? She took out the amulet that her father had made for her, put it in her pocket and raced down the stairs.

Daphne was a hasty person and didn’t care too much about her appearance. She never chose fluffy skirts. They made it difficult for her to move freely. She preferred to pull on trousers. Moving slow was a waste of time. She didn’t care if her brown braids came loose. Messy was fine with her.

She was alone this morning. Her parents had already gone to the forest. She was late again since woodcutting was not the most exciting



thing she could do. She prepared a quick sandwich and went into the woods. While she was skipping among the trees, she heard her father's scream and ran towards his voice. She saw her mother, Feray, bandaging her father's wrist. He got injured when a tree fell and barely escaped being trapped under it, they told her.

Feray stared at Daphne and said, "You should have come earlier. This is a hard task for only the two of us." Daphne didn't reply. Several villagers came to check the cause of the scream. One of them said to her mother, "Poor you. Only one child—and a girl—a careless girl."

It was a long day. On the way back, Daphne was thinking about how much she hated the family job. Then again, it was not nice to look down on the family profession. She felt the amulet in her pocket, took it out and moved it to her nose. She took in the smell of lavender essence that she dropped on it frequently. She told herself, "I'll find my way, but how?"

When they arrived home, they saw the mukhtar, the village official, waiting for them with a paper in hand. He spoke to Daphne's parents. "You are not allowed to do any sort of woodcutting any more. There has been an order passed from the district governor." He pointed to the document.

"What's it all about?"

"They call it a protected area or a nature conservation area—whatever. Even picking weeds from there is forbidden. You could face a huge penalty that could lead to imprisonment."

None of them could sleep that night. Daphne dreamt of the forest, which, in her mind, was magical. An enchanted area that required special protection. She pictured flowers with glittering petals, butterflies with luminescent wings. It only made sense that such a place should be hidden from a saw and an axe. Her parents had other concerns. They

kept wondering how they could possibly make a living without stepping foot in the forest. It was the only job they knew.

The next morning, they sat together at the breakfast table for the first time in a while. Even the sunlight was dim. Nobody spoke; only the sounds of cutlery could be heard. Her father took a deep breath and said, “I have to find a way to go into the forest. But this time, I will go alone. You two must stay home; I can’t risk us all.”

The following dawn, Daphne’s father set off on the forest path. Daphne woke up early this time to see him off. He was quickly enveloped by the trees.

When evening came, Daphne’s father appeared right at the beginning of the path with his wooden cart, but multiple officers blocked his way. They told him that he would be charged a heavy fine. Her father argued with the officers, and they took him to the police station. Daphne and her mother didn’t hear from him or the police officers for a long time.

That heavy fine was now added to their struggles of earning a living. Daphne thought, “If we can pay this money off, my father would come home again.”

One night, while Daphne and her mother were sitting on the balcony, drinking their tea, a light breeze blew. It gently caressed Daphne’s cheek. After a sip of her tea, Daphne took the amulet out of her pocket. Her father had made it for her from the enchanted forest wood. She ran her fingers on its beautifully carved grooves. She placed the amulet under her nose and inhaled the lavender scent. An idea popped into her mind. “I’ve got it!” she said to her mother. “I found our way out: we will plant lavender!”

“Lavender, my favourite fragrance,” Feray said.



“It’s a wonderful plant. It can grow in almost every type of soil. It resists drought, heat and cold,” Daphne said. They chose a field to plant it in. Her mother rested her hand on Daphne’s shoulder. “I can’t believe my little girl has grown up and comes up with her own ideas.”

Until now, they had never thought of cultivating because any form of agriculture was difficult with the cold winds that blew from the mountains. However, lavender could be very different.

At the beginning of March, they plowed the field. Daphne murmured, “The spring would come with its blessings, I am sure.” They planted the seeds and watered generously. While they were working in the field one day, the mukhtar appeared again and informed them that Daphne’s father would not be with them for six more months. Daphne thought, “In six months, the lavender would be ready to sell.”

Days went by in the same way. They plucked the weeds one by one. But despite all this effort, insects haunted the seedlings and prevented the lavender from blooming. What bad luck.

While having lunch in the field, Feray said, “It is a must to spray medicine, my dear.”

Daphne didn’t understand, but she soon realized that the so-called medicine was indeed an insecticide for insects.

“No, Mother, we will not poison our beautiful earth. It would poison the caterpillars I smile at every morning and the trees in the magical forest too. Butterflies would not visit our garden any more. There has to be another way.”

“My dear, I can see you are disappointed, but this is how things go.”

“No, Mum. Please give me a week. I will find a solution.”

Her mother agreed. Daphne read, searched, scanned. She couldn’t find any other way. Finally, she decided to go to Grandmother Aida, the

oldest one in the village and the grumpiest! Grandmother Aida, with her wrinkled face and hoarse voice, was mocked by the children of the village, who called her ‘The Witch’.

She went into Granny Aida’s home. Old teapots, yoghurt pots and even rubber shoes were lined up in rows, full of soil and plants. Inside there was an intense spice smell that Daphne couldn’t identify and lots of peaceful cats sleeping or walking around.

Granny Aida seemed to have a remedy for every trouble. It was as if there were secret formulas written in her uncovered head equipped with white hair. She opened her wooden chest and took out a large glass bottle. “This one has an oil mixture. I made it from sesame, flax, cotton, poppyseed and olive. You will mix this with sunflower oil and soft soap and spray it on your plants, and no insects will come near them. If other pests come, let them share your crops. Nature will surely return what it takes, far better too. Remember that.”

Daphne’s eyes glistened. She finally found a non-toxic solution. Butterflies would continue to fly freely in their garden. As she left her grandmother’s house, she kept repeating Aida’s words in her head.

Daphne followed Granny Aida’s exact instructions. She sprinkled the oil mixture on each seedling as though it was a magic potion. Daphne and her mother watered the saplings as though they were feeding a baby. All through spring, as the tiny blossoms bloomed, the whole field smelled like her amulet.

Harvest time had finally come. They collected all the seedlings, laid them out on the terrace to dry and separated the dried lavender blossoms from their stems. The beautiful fragrance of lavender filled the whole house. They stuffed it in pouches and loaded them onto the trucks.



Daphne couldn't sleep all night out of excitement. On the way to the factory, she was bouncing in her seat. When they stopped in front of the factory, they saw sacks of dried lavender being unloaded from a truck much larger than theirs. Tears began to flow from Daphne's eyes. Feray took her hand. Daphne grasped her amulet.

They entered through the factory door and saw two men talking to each other. One of the men was unloading the sacks from the truck. "How is it possible, sir? You're saying these are not organic. But we grew them in the field."

"My friend, don't you understand? We want lavender that has been grown in chemical-free soil. The plant is going to be used for the production of oil for sensitive skin," the factory clerk said.

"But sir, without insecticides, all the crops we raise would be eaten by the insects. Don't be ridiculous."

"Insecticides? We cannot buy yours."

The factory clerk noticed Daphne and her mother.

"What are you here for, ladies?" he asked. Daphne saw a butterfly float away from his shoulder.

"We don't have insecticides. Granny taught us. Our lavender is organic," Daphne said.

The factory clerk offered to buy all of their pouches by paying right then and there, adding, "Since this lavender has been grown in special conditions, better conditions, the price shall also be special." After everyone shook hands, the factory clerk said, "See you next season."

On the way back home, they both had a warm smile plastered on their faces. Daphne brought the amulet to her lips. She closed her eyes.

"Father's coming home tomorrow," her mother said.

"We have so much to tell him."