

## *The Funeral/ The Forest*

Shhhhhh. Shhhhh.

Shhhhadow people tall as trees  
standing, swaying, knocking knees,  
and whispering like breathless beeeees  
overheard overhead.

Shhhh. Beee quiet.

Some of them look familiar,  
but they're too tall to make out,  
too far above to hear her shout,  
"Who are these people?

Why are you here?"

Her tiny voice can't reach their ears,  
hidden as they are by black umbrellas.

Like hoods, like masks,

like big plastic bats

from deep dark places.

She can't make out their shrouded faces.

Lily shouts again,

"Where's Gran?

She should be here, I'm sure.

She'd show me what they're all here for."

Shhhhh.

"They're here to pay their resepects".

Their what?

Their respects?

They buzz up above like big black insects.

In fact they infect  
the air.  
They make it feel sick  
And heavy, a cloak so thick  
She can't breathe, and black,  
"How much respects does it cost to get Gran back?"  
A push and a shove.  
A shout from above.  
"Will someone get that child under control?"  
Push harder, run faster.  
Through the forest of legs  
All in black.  
"I'm going to find her. I'm going to bring her back!"

Lily runs and she runs,  
Till her feet feel numb  
And her heart thuds in her throat  
And her mouth tastes of metal  
And her breath makes a whistle like a boiling kettle  
And the tall black figures  
Have vanished in the dark  
And all around is the soft smell of wet leaves and bark.

The sky has turned green.  
Trees curl overhead,  
The ground gives underfoot  
Like a mossy mud bed  
Of earth.  
The buzzing has stopped.

That terrible whisper, that sinister sound.  
Instead there's something quite different around.  
A sound  
That seems to come from deep down underground.  
A rustle, a crack  
A crunch and a groan.  
In this lost lonely forest  
Lily knows she's not alone.

"Gran?  
Gran, Where are you? Gran!"

The forest curls it's fingers  
And softly strokes her cheek.  
An old oak wipes away her tears,  
And the willows watch her weep.  
With a sigh of sympathy they swing  
Their branches round her shoulders.  
For a moment she feels safe from strangers,  
And she lets the forest hold her.

And hold her.

With a warm woody creak,  
The branches tighten their grip.  
Lily wriggles, and squirms.  
Lily gives them the slip.  
And they close their embrace  
Round the space.

Where she only a moment ago had been.

Then from behind her, unseen,

A tendril of ivy

Comes slithering sideways to softly, slyly,

Stroke her hair.

She flinches and it flicks

With a rustle to her wrist,

Where it rests and it wrings

Her forearm like a flannel.

Lily flails, and she flees

And she flies through the forest.

The branches reach out

And claw at her back.

Leaves swirl, twirl and whirl

As she creeps through the cracks

Between bushes and trees.

Lily thinks that she sees

The forest seem to move

Seem to change.

Like it's playing a game.

Like a cat with a mouse.

Frantic, she shouts.

"Gran, where are you?".

Vines twist underfoot

As she runs and she slips

And she trip trip trips

But before she falls

The undergrowth grabs her,

Flings her up with a shiver,

Pushing and pulling her hither and thither.

One moment to the next

With each and every breath

The forest shifts

The forest swirls

The forest twists

And the forest turns.

“Gran!” Lily shouts,

As she casts her eyes about.

But there’s no-one to be seen

Just the gathering gloom of green, green, green...

But wait!

What’s that?

A flash of red through the leaves.

Something warm that weaves

Its way through the woods

Through the wild wild woods

Then is gone.

“Gran?”

Could it be?

Could she really be there?

Surely that was a flash of her fiery red hair?

But no.

Whatever it was is gone.

And gran’s hair is grey.

Like silver, like stone.

Lily is left all alone.

She sits with a sigh

And she cries, cries, cries.