

On her usual walk in the forest, Grace meets an unusual boy.

### Tuesday

Going through the forest is my favourite part of the walk. My dog Benji loves it too. I'm Grace. I live on a farm with my parents and I take Benji for a walk most days after school. While Benji's playing, I stop to take a photo of a butterfly. I'm thinking about posting it on Facebook, but then I hear Benji barking. He's jumping and running around a boy. The poor boy looks worried. 'Benji, stop! Come here!' I call and throw him his ball. I'm about to say sorry to the boy, but he's gone.

### Wednesday

It's cold today, so Benji and I are walking fast. As we go through the forest, it starts raining so I run. Suddenly, I fall and I'm on my back. OUCH! That hurt!

Then there's someone there and a voice asks 'Are you all right?' I look up and see the boy from yesterday. 'I'm OK,' I say and the boy helps me up.  
'I haven't seen you at school. Do you live near here?' I ask.  
'No, I'm from Manchester,' he says. 'Sorry! I have to go. Can you walk? Do you need help?'  
'No, I'm fine. Thanks!' I say and the boy walks away.  
'I'm Grace,' I call. 'What's your name?' but he's already gone.

At home, Mum's watching the news.  
'Hi Grace. Do you know about this boy, Mark?' she asks.  
'No, what boy?' I say.  
'A boy from Manchester. He's run away from home. Look! This is his dad.'  
There's a man on TV sitting with a policeman. He's crying as the policeman asks people to help. Then they show a photo of the missing boy. It's the boy from the forest. He's Mark. Should I say something?  
'Poor man,' says Mum. 'I just hope they find his son soon.'  
No, I mustn't say anything. If I tell Mum, the police will come and find Mark. What if he's run away for a good reason? I should talk to him first.

### Thursday

I can't find Mark, so I shout, 'Mark, where are you?'  
No answer.  
'Mark,' I shout again, 'I know about you.'  
After a moment, he appears. 'What do you know? How do you know my name?'  
'Your dad was on TV. The police are looking for you.'  
He looks shocked. 'Did you say anything? Have you told them?'  
'No,' I say. 'I wanted to talk to you first. What's happened? Why have you run away?'  
'I had an argument with my dad. A bad one.'  
'What about?' I ask.  
Mark points to a fallen tree and we sit down.  
'My mum died four years ago. It was a very difficult time for me and for Dad. He was sad for a long time, but then he met someone new. Mel's her name.'  
'Oh, and don't you like her?' I ask.  
'No, not much. She's not a bad person, but we don't really connect. She wants my dad for herself and she isn't interested in me.'  
'But, what about your dad? Have you talked to him?'

**Graded reading: A walk in the forest (level 1) – text**

'He tells me to try harder with her, but I can't. The night I ran away, he told me that we're all moving to London. Mel's from London, you see. Then he told me that he and Mel want to get married and have a baby. We both got angry and I told him I'm not moving to London. I took my tent and I left in the middle of the night.'

'But what will you do? You can't live here.' I tell him.

'I know, but my grandad and my friends are in Manchester. I don't want to move to London.'

'You might like London,' I say.

'That's what my dad says.'

I feel sorry for Mark, but I think of his dad crying on TV and feel sorry for him too.

'What are you going to do?' I ask.

'I don't know. I need time to think.'

**Friday**

Mark's waiting for me in the forest. I've got some news.

'The police came to the farm this morning. They're going to search the forest tomorrow.'

Mark looks sad, 'I didn't want this. My dad, crying on TV and the police looking for me. I don't know what to do.'

'I've got an idea. Why don't you live with your grandad in Manchester? Let your dad and Mel move to London and visit them in the holidays.'

Mark doesn't answer at first, then he looks at me and smiles.

'Can I use your phone?' he asks. 'I need to call my dad.'

*Robin Newton*