

Red Tree

Chet liked rules.

Not because he enjoyed following them, but because they made the world predictable. School trips, especially, relied on rules to stop things going wrong — which was why he noticed the open gate immediately.

“Do Not Enter,” the sign should have said.

But the gate hung loose on one hinge, and the sign lay face-down in the grass, hidden by leaves.

Umut didn’t notice it at all.

“Look,” she said, pointing down the narrow path that curled away from the rest of the gardens. “That way looks way more interesting.”

Chet hesitated. He adjusted the straps of his backpack and frowned. “We’re supposed to stay where we can see the teachers.”

Umut, her brown hair tied neatly back, grinned at him. “We’re still *in* the gardens. Besides, if they didn’t want us going that way, they’d shut the gate properly.”

That was how Chet found himself stepping through the opening, his sensible instincts trailing behind him like forgotten luggage.

The path grew darker as they walked. The air felt warmer too, thicker somehow, as though the garden was holding its breath. Then, without warning, the trees parted.

At the centre of a small clearing stood the most astonishing thing Chet had ever seen.

A tree.

Not green. Not brown.

Red.

Its trunk shimmered like polished copper, and instead of leaves, hundreds of glowing stones hung from its branches — rubies, sapphires, emeralds — each one pulsing softly, as if alive. The light they gave off painted the clearing in shades of gold and crimson.

Umut gasped. “We’re rich.”

Chet stared, his brown eyes wide. “This isn’t normal.”

“That’s the best part,” Umut replied, already stepping closer.

As she reached out, the stones flickered. The tree seemed to sigh.

“Hello,” said a voice.

They froze.

The voice came from everywhere and nowhere at once. "It has been a long time since anyone visited."

Chet swallowed. "We should go."

"But you came in," the voice continued calmly. "And those who enter are offered a choice."

The glow intensified, and suddenly the stones dropped — not falling, but floating gently towards them.

"Take one," the voice said. "And it will be yours forever."

Umut's hand hovered inches away from a ruby. It was beautiful. Perfect.

Chet felt his heart pound. Something about the tree's stillness unsettled him. "What happens if we do?"

There was a pause.

"Every gift has a cost."

Umut slowly lowered her hand. "That doesn't sound good."

The light dimmed slightly.

"Wise," the voice said.

The stones drifted back to the branches, and the tree's glow softened. The path behind them reappeared, brighter now, clearer.

When they stepped back into the main gardens, the sounds of laughing children and distant teachers rushed towards them.

"Did that just happen?" Umut asked.

Chet nodded.

Later that afternoon, as they left, Chet glanced back. The gate was closed. The sign stood upright once more.

DO NOT ENTER.

For once, Chet was glad someone had put it there.

Comprehension Questions

1. What does the opening paragraph suggest about Chet's personality?
 - A) He enjoys taking risks
 - B) He dislikes school trips
 - C) He prefers order and predictability
 - D) He follows others without thinking

2. Why does Umut want to take the narrow path?
 - A) She thinks it will lead back faster
 - B) She believes it looks more interesting
 - C) She wants to avoid the teachers
 - D) She recognises it from before

3. Why does the author describe the air as "holding its breath"?
 - A) To show the children are tired
 - B) To suggest something unusual is about to happen
 - C) To describe the weather
 - D) To show the garden is empty

4. What is unusual about the red tree?
 - A) It grows fruit
 - B) It moves its branches
 - C) It speaks loudly
 - D) It grows glowing stones instead of leaves

5. Why does Chet feel uneasy when he sees the tree?
 - A) He thinks it is dangerous
 - B) He wants to take a stone
 - C) He does not like gardens
 - D) He feels cold

6. What does the tree mean by "Every gift has a cost"?
 - A) The stones are heavy
 - B) The stones belong to someone else
 - C) Taking a stone would have a negative consequence
 - D) The stones will disappear

7. Why does Umut decide not to take a stone?
 - A) She is frightened of the dark
 - B) She realises the offer may be risky
 - C) She does not like jewellery
 - D) Chet tells her not to

8. What happens after the children refuse the gift?
 - A) The tree becomes angry
 - B) The stones fall to the ground

C) The path disappears

D) The tree allows them to leave

9. What does the closed gate and upright sign at the end suggest?

A) The garden has changed

B) The tree was destroyed

C) The children imagined everything

D) The warning should have been followed

10. What is the main moral of the story?

A) Magic is dangerous

B) Rules are always unfair

C) Curiosity should never be rewarded

D) Not everything valuable should be taken

Answers

1. **C**
2. **B**
3. **B**
4. **D**
5. **A**
6. **C**
7. **B**
8. **D**
9. **D**
10. **D**