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The Attic Door

by Judith Bauer Stamper

Rosalyn pushed open the old iron gate in front of the house. The gate banged shut behind her as she walked up to the front door. Rosalyn pressed the doorbell. She waited. She could hear someone walking inside the house. A few seconds later, the front door opened.

"Rosalyn. It *is* you, isn't it?" Then she was hugged warmly by her aunt.

"Hello, Aunt Harriet," said Rosalyn.

"Come inside, dear. Come out of this heat. The house always stays cool inside."

Rosalyn followed her aunt into a large, dark hallway. It was as cool as an underground cave.

"Here you are. You're finally visiting me after so many years. How was the train ride?"

Aunt Harriet didn't wait for an answer. She **chattered** on. "I've been asking your father to let you come here for years. I know that your father didn't like my husband, Arthur. But dear Arthur has been dead for four years now."

Aunt Harriet paused and



sighed. "Yes. It has been four long years since Arthur died."

Rosalyn stared down at her feet. She didn't know what to say. Her mother had warned her that Aunt Harriet might be a little strange. Her mother was right.

"This is an **enormous** house, Aunt Harriet," Rosalyn finally said. "It has so many rooms."

"I'll show you around once you've had time to unpack. But now you'll want to see your bedroom."

"See your bedroom. See your bedroom," a high voice repeated.

"Who was that?" Rosalyn asked uneasily.

Aunt Harriet laughed. She walked to a corner of the room. Then she pulled a bright green cloth off a stand. There sat a parrot in a cage.

"That was Polly. Wasn't that you, Polly?" Aunt Harriet said. Then she made bird noises to the parrot.

Rosalyn didn't go over to the cage. She didn't like parrots. "Aunt Harriet," said Rosalyn, "I think I'll go to my room now. If you could show me where it is."

"Of course, Rosalyn." Aunt Harriet turned to the bird. "I'll be back in a few minutes, Polly."

Aunt Harriet led the way up the stairs. She walked to the room at the end of the hall.

"This is your room, Rosalyn. I hope you like it. It used to be my room when I was first married."

Rosalyn peeked inside. The whole room was done in purple. The blanket on the bed was purple. The wallpaper had purple flowers. Even the furniture had been painted purple.

"Oh, Aunt Harriet." That was all Rosalyn could think of to say.

"Put your things away, dear. Then come down. We'll have tea together."

A little later, Rosalyn came down the stairs to join her aunt for tea. Aunt Harriet was waiting in a room off the hall. Tea and cake were on the table.

"Have some of this delicious cake, Rosalyn. It's so nice to have company. Polly and I usually have to eat alone. Don't we, Polly?"

"Eat alone. Eat alone," squawked the bird from the other room.

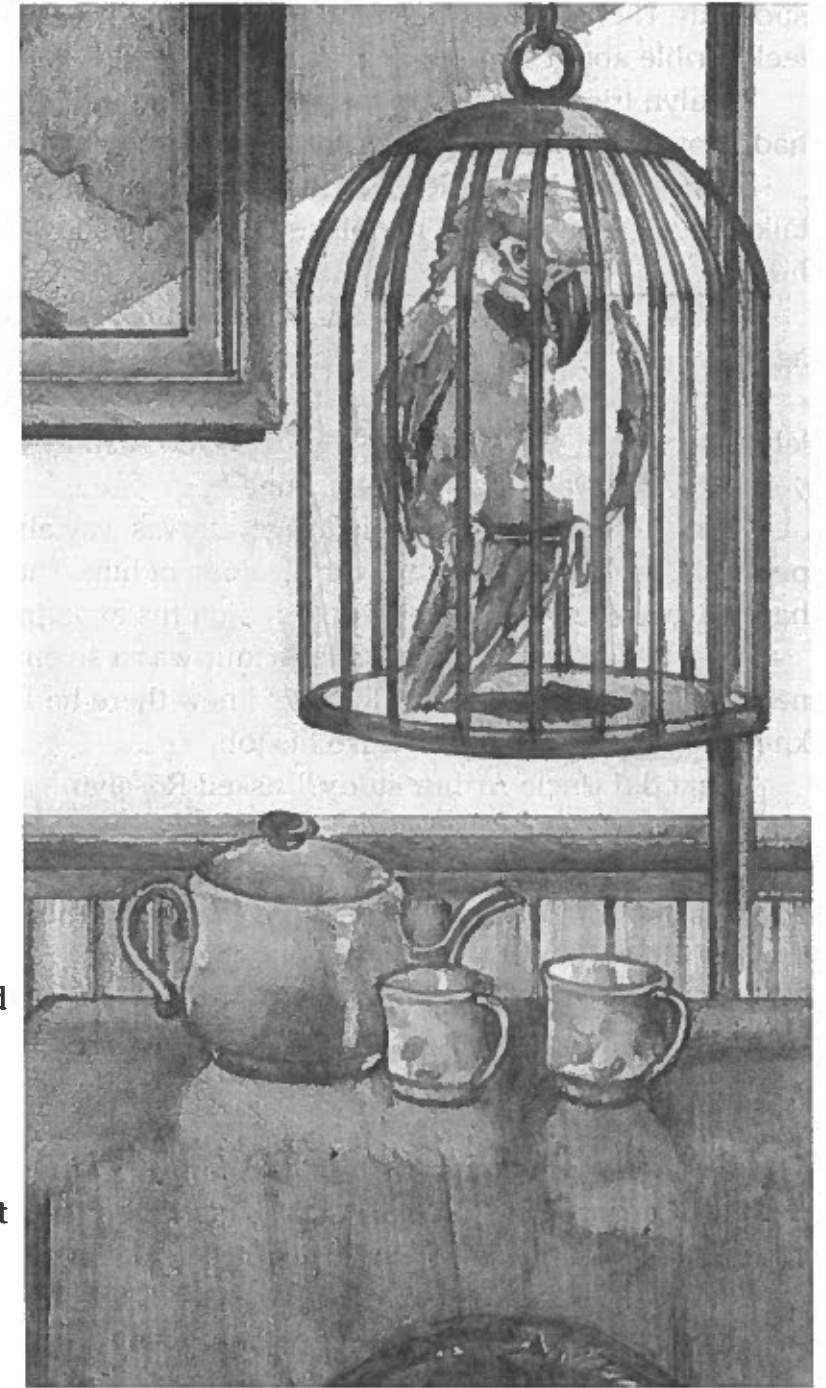
Rosalyn ate some of the cake and sipped her tea. She looked slowly around the room. Everything looked so old-fashioned. The walls were covered with pictures of Aunt Harriet's family. One picture, in particular, caught Rosalyn's eye. It was a picture of a boy.

"Is that your son, Herman?" asked Rosalyn.

Aunt Harriet coughed. Then a terrible choking sound came from Aunt Harriet's throat.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Harriet," Rosalyn said quickly. "I shouldn't have asked you that. That was **rude** of me."

Rosalyn knew that Herman had disappeared many years ago. He had disappeared



suddenly. He had never been found. Rosalyn knew that Aunt Harriet must feel terrible about that.

Rosalyn tried to make up for upsetting her aunt. Rosalyn said, "I wish I had known Herman better. I'm sorry that I only met him a few times."

By now Aunt Harriet felt a little better. "Yes, dear," she said. "But let's not talk about the past. If you're finished eating, I'll show you the rest of the house."

Rosalyn followed her aunt out of the room. They were in the hallway again.

Aunt Harriet said, "First I want to show you your Uncle Arthur's laboratory. That was where he did his work. Arthur was a great scientist, you know. He was far ahead of his time."

"Yes," Aunt Harriet continued. "Arthur was way ahead of his time. The people at the university were very jealous of him. That was the reason he had to leave the school. But he carried on his experiments at home."

Rosalyn had known that Uncle Arthur was a scientist. But her parents never talked about his work. Rosalyn knew there had been a problem. She knew that he was forced to leave his job.

"What did Uncle Arthur study?" asked Rosalyn.

"Mutations," answered Aunt Harriet. "Ways of changing human beings."

They had walked into a large room. In the corners were piles of old books. The room was filled with large glass jars. There were chemicals in the jars. Rosalyn saw test tubes everywhere.

Aunt Harriet looked around the room. She said, "This laboratory must be kept just the way that Arthur left it. Arthur was a great man, Rosalyn. Someday everyone will know that."

"Yes, Aunt Harriet," Rosalyn said. She followed her aunt out of the laboratory. They walked into the hall again.

Aunt Harriet said, "You can look around the rest of the house by yourself. But I must make one thing very clear." Aunt Harriet's voice grew hard. "Never go up to the attic. Do you understand that, Rosalyn?"

"Do you understand that, Rosalyn?" said the parrot in the next room.

Aunt Harriet said, "I mean that, Rosalyn. Never open the door that leads

up to the attic. If you do, you will be sorry!"

"You will be sorry!" Polly said.

"I understand, Aunt Harriet," said Rosalyn.

Rosalyn spent the next days wandering around the house. She looked through some old books she found. The old books reminded her of Uncle Arthur. He studied mutations, she remembered—ways of changing human beings. She sat in the garden with her aunt. Aunt Harriet sometimes talked about Uncle Arthur. But she never mentioned Herman.

The time passed pleasantly enough for Rosalyn. But after a while, she began to get **bored**. There was no one to talk to but Aunt Harriet.

The fourth day she was there, Aunt Harriet said, "Today I'm going to visit a friend. Would you like to come along?"

Rosalyn thought



about it. She said to herself, "That won't be too interesting." She told her aunt, "I think I'll stay at home. I can sit in the garden and read."

After her aunt left, Rosalyn went up to her room. She tried to read a book she had brought from home. But she didn't like it very much. After a while, she closed the book. Rosalyn got up and went out into the hall. She couldn't think of anything to do. Her vacation was turning out to be disappointing.

Rosalyn walked down the hallway. She passed the door that led up to the attic. Rosalyn stopped in front of the door. Aunt Harriet had acted so strangely about the attic. She certainly didn't want Rosalyn to go up there.

Rosalyn asked herself, "What could be up there?" Probably just old clothes and things. Rosalyn put her hand on the doorknob. To her surprise, the doorknob turned. She quickly took her hand away. Aunt Harriet had warned her not to go up there.

Rosalyn began to walk away. But she was curious about the attic. Aunt Harriet *was* a little strange. Rosalyn thought, "There's probably no reason at all why I shouldn't go up there."

Suddenly Rosalyn made up her mind. She put her hand on the doorknob and turned it. The door stuck for a moment. Then it swung open. There were stairs that led up to the attic. Rosalyn slowly walked up the steps. When she reached the top, Rosalyn saw something horrible. She stared at the thing—the awful thing! She let out a terrible scream. Then she hurried back down the attic stairs.

Rosalyn felt sick. She couldn't believe what she had just seen. It was some horrible, furry beast!

Rosalyn pushed open the attic door. She ran down the hall. Then she heard what she had feared. Steps were coming after her. They were the footsteps of that thing!

For a moment Rosalyn was too frightened to move. The awful creature came nearer! It reached out a fur-covered arm! Rosalyn ran.

She ran down the steps. She nearly fell. The thing was coming closer! Rosalyn ran into the living room.

Then she realized that there was no way out of the room. She ran back

out. She just missed the thing's outstretched arm.

Rosalyn ran into the kitchen. The thing ran after her.

Rosalyn tried to get its face out of her mind. It was the face that bothered her most. It was a strangely *human* face. She seemed to recognize that face!

Rosalyn ran through the kitchen. If only she could get to the front door! But she didn't make it there. She stumbled and fell.

Just then the front door opened. There stood Aunt Harriet. Aunt Harriet looked down at Rosalyn. Then she looked at the furry creature.

"Rosalyn!" said Aunt Harriet. "What did I tell you about going into the attic! I told you not to go up there!"

Aunt Harriet shook a finger at Rosalyn. "You've made poor Herman nervous now."

"You've made poor Herman nervous now," the parrot said.

"Poor, poor Herman," Aunt Harriet said. "He has never been the same since Arthur's last experiment." Then Aunt Harriet gently patted her son Herman's head.

Aunt Harriet looked down at Rosalyn again. "I'm sorry, Rosalyn," she said. "But you know we can't let you go—not now that you know our secret!



I'll call your parents. I'll tell them that you never arrived. You'll have to stay here in your room."

Rosalyn looked up into Aunt Harriet's face.

"But you'll be very happy here with us," Aunt Harriet said.

"But you'll be very happy here with us," repeated the parrot.



LOOKING FOR FACTS IN THE STORY.
How well can you find facts in a story? Put an x in the box next to the right answer.

1. Uncle Arthur had been dead for
 a. four years.
 b. five years.
 c. ten years.
2. The color of Rosalyn's room was
 a. red.
 b. green.
 c. purple.
3. Rosalyn was not supposed to go
 a. into the garden.
 b. into the attic.
 c. out of the house.
4. Aunt Harriet said that Uncle Arthur was
 a. very foolish.
 b. very old.
 c. a great man.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

EXAMINING VOCABULARY WORDS.
Here are four vocabulary questions. Put an x in the box next to the right answer. The vocabulary words are printed in **boldface** in the story. You may look back at the words before you answer the questions.

1. Aunt Harriet didn't wait for an answer. She chattered on. The word *chattered* means
 a. continued to walk.
 b. continued to talk.
 c. continued to eat.
2. The house was enormous. It had many rooms. The word *enormous* means
 a. very large.
 b. very small.
 c. new.
3. Rosalyn should not have asked about Herman. That was rude. The word *rude* means
 a. wise.
 b. helpful.
 c. not polite.
4. Rosalyn was alone and bored. The word *bored* means
 a. pleased.
 b. not interested.
 c. afraid.

x 5 =
NUMBER CORRECT YOUR SCORE

