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Writer/s: Paul Byrne

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*They say to the west of the woods where the roses die,
lives a cute little girl who can not lie.*

He knew now that that was not true, yet still he liked rhymes, he collected them, and his was by far the greatest, most wonderful and perfect of all collections in the world. But he didn't like to say so. His mother and father had taught him to tell the truth, to be honest and never to gloat unless, he wanted the bogeyman to come. He hated the bogeyman.

Rose Wood now was nothing more than a collection of barren looking trees on an otherwise uninspiring field. To the west of the wood the urban regeneration program had swept in and now a massive mall complete with a 9 screen cinema and 10 restaurants dominated the landscape. He was dismayed to discover this on a late Tuesday in October when the rain washed the muddy field into a swirling pit of lies. 'It was okay though', he told himself 'the wood was still kind of there'. All he needed was the cute little girl who can't lie, so he headed into the mall.

*And in the darkness of that wood,
he laid to rest all he could,
except of course one white ribbon bow,
as pure and sweet as the driven snow.*

Looking around he became upset about the absence of ribbons worn by girls. It was almost as if they wanted to ruin his collection, the most perfect collection in the world. It was so perfect he wanted to tell the whole mall about it, but he knew he couldn't. Instead he bought a white ribbon at a store, made his way to the food court then he carefully sipped a Coke and scouted the area for a cute little girl to whom he could give the bow.

He saw lots of little girls. Almost all of them were cute enough for the poem, but all of them had there parents with them. When he tried to talk to them they would usher their child out of the way. This upset him and he was close to tears. He knew he had to talk to them so they would not tell lies. He had to, it was for his collection, his perfect collection. If only he could tell the parents, then they would see.

Just as he was giving up and wishing the rhyme away he noticed her by the doorway of a clothes shop, all of eight years old and holding her younger brother as their mother bustled around the sales inside. Leaning down to talk to her, he asked her some questions and happy she was not lying, asked her mother's name. It was Wendy, and the little boy was called Billy, as in the goats. The man smiled at this, told Billy to get his mummy, and then led the little girl away. Her body was found a week later in Rose Wood.

Worried Wendy weeps,

as little Billy sleeps.

As he washed, he giggled to himself at the new rhyme for his collection. And after he had wiped the mud from his floor, he wrote the rhyme out carefully on a piece of paper, crossing out the words 'can not' and writing 'could not' for he saw no reason for the rhyme to be inaccurate, after all, it had to go in his collection, his wonderful collection. Taking the poem, he checked its eight lines and knew that the rhyme was true. He placed it carefully in his scrap book with the bow and smiled. The bogeyman would be happy and he was happy, his collection was the best.

Later that night he read obscure poetry books by complete unknowns, gathered from little bookshops, run by old ladies without a clue, who's only reading was stories set in the war, so he just bit his tongue when they proudly told him they had the greatest selection of rhymes.

It had now been almost a year since the trip to Rose Wood. Since then the collection had continued to grow and older rhymes had been pushed away from memory. Therefore it came as a great surprise to him that all of the sudden the sky began to flash its blue over his house and the birds began to wail like sirens. He knew what it meant: the bogeyman had come.

He found himself alone in a barren room, being talked at by a man who had the nerve to go on and on about his collection. He was disturbed when the man started to talk about his own collection and how it was much, much greater and more perfect than his. He knew it was not true, for his collection held a copy of every rhyme ever written, in great editions on gold paper and transcribed in silver ink. If he would read these rhymes he would marvel at their splendour.

But he sat and said nothing. He knew the man was wrong but also knew that if he told him so, he may never get out of this place. The man held in his hand a scrap book he saw was his, and he saw the ribbon had come loose, the man was asking if it was his. The man said he was almost certain it was and it would not hurt to gloat about the book, and if he did he would give him something special. The man held it up: a small red book, and told him that in it was a great rhyme, one which would make people dream as the words were spoken and birds cry.

This was enough for the man whose lust for rhyme was insatiable, whose years of not gloating had destroyed him. He told everything, he boasted happily and as the man left, he was given the book. He grasped greedily for the rhyme but to his horror the pages were empty.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a
story by Paul Byrne.*