

FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL

Story Material

The Photographer's Mystery

A captivating mystery about a teenager who discovers undeveloped photographs from the 1980s that reveal a forgotten artist's secret.

Level: B1 (Intermediate)**Age Group:** Teens (11-16)**Skill:** Reading**Topic:** Art & Mystery**Duration:** ~50 minutes**Pages:** 29 story pages

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and understand a B1-level mystery story about art and friendship
 - ✓ Learn 20 new vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading comprehension with multiple-choice questions
 - ✓ Understand themes of art, heritage, and perseverance
 - ✓ Discuss making art accessible to the public

*Note: In the online version, **highlighted vocabulary words** have hover definitions.*

Part 1 — The Story

Chapter 1: The Inheritance

Nora sat on the edge of her grandmother's bed and looked around the empty room. It had been three weeks since Grandma Rose had passed away, and her mother had finally begun the painful task of sorting through her belongings. The wardrobe doors stood open, revealing rows of neatly folded clothes. The dressing table was covered with small glass bottles of perfume and a silver hairbrush that Nora remembered playing with as a child. Everything in this room told a story, and now all those stories were coming to an end.

"Nora, come and look at this," her mother called from the hallway. She was kneeling beside a large cardboard box that had been stored on top of the wardrobe. "I think this was meant for you." On the lid, in Grandma Rose's careful handwriting, was a label that read: FOR NORA — MY CURIOUS GIRL. Nora's heart tightened. Grandma Rose had always called her that. She opened the box carefully. Inside, wrapped in layers of tissue paper, was a beautiful **vintage** camera — a Leica M6, with a leather case that was soft and worn from years of use. Beneath the camera was a velvet pouch, and inside the pouch were six small canisters of film. A handwritten note was tucked between them: "These were never finished. Perhaps you can finish them for me. With all my love, Grandma Rose."

Nora held the camera up to the window light. It was heavy and solid, nothing like the plastic cameras she had used before. She pressed the shutter button gently and heard a satisfying mechanical click. "Did Grandma take photographs?" she asked her mother. Her mother smiled sadly. "She was actually quite talented. Before she married your grandfather, she worked as a **portrait** photographer in London. She took pictures of musicians, actors, artists — all sorts of interesting people. But she gave it up when they moved here." Nora looked at the six canisters of **undeveloped** film in her hand. What had Grandma Rose photographed? And why had the film never been developed? She slipped the camera strap around her neck and made a decision. She was going to find out.

Chapter 2: The Dark Room

The next morning, Nora took the camera and the film canisters to school. She had remembered that Mr. Okonkwo, the art teacher, ran a photography club on Wednesdays and had set up a dark room — a small **laboratory** for developing photographs — in the basement of the art block. She found him during break time. "Mr. Okonkwo, I have some old film that I want to develop. Can I use the dark room?" she asked. He raised his eyebrows when he saw the Leica. "That is a beautiful camera. Where did you get it?" "It was my grandmother's. It is part of my **inheritance**. She left me these rolls of film too, but I do not know what is on them."

Mr. Okonkwo examined one of the canisters carefully. "This is black and white film. Professional grade, too. Your grandmother had good taste." He smiled. "Come to the dark room after school. I will show you how to develop it." That afternoon, Nora stood in the red-lit dark room and watched as Mr. Okonkwo guided her through the process. They poured

chemicals into trays, unrolled the film, and carefully submerged the negatives in the developing solution. "Now we wait," he said. The minutes felt like hours. Then, slowly, like ghosts appearing through fog, images began to form on the paper. Nora leaned forward, her breath held. The first photograph showed a woman standing in front of a large canvas, paintbrush in hand, looking directly at the camera with an expression of fierce concentration.

"Who is she?" Nora whispered. They developed twelve more photographs from the first roll. Every single one featured the same woman: painting in a bright studio, walking through a garden, sitting at a table covered in sketches, laughing with Grandma Rose in what appeared to be a restaurant. In several of the photographs, extraordinary paintings were visible in the background — bold, colourful **portraits** of ordinary people that seemed to glow with life. "These are **remarkable**," Mr. Okonkwo said, holding one of the prints up to the light. "Your grandmother was a very skilled photographer. And whoever this artist is, her work looks incredible." Nora stared at the woman's face. She felt certain she had seen her somewhere before, but she could not remember where.

Chapter 3: Eleanor Blackwood

That evening, Nora spread the photographs across her bedroom floor and studied every detail. In one of the pictures, she could see a name written on a canvas in the background: E. BLACKWOOD. She opened her laptop and typed "Eleanor Blackwood artist" into the search engine. The results made her sit up straight. Eleanor Blackwood had been one of the most promising British painters of the 1980s. Her work — large, vivid portraits of working-class people — had been shown in galleries across Europe and had won several **prestigious** awards. Art critics had called her "the most exciting talent of her generation." But in 1986, at the height of her career, Eleanor had suddenly **vanished** from public life.

According to several articles, Eleanor had been preparing for a major **exhibition** at a London gallery when she disappeared. She cancelled the show without explanation, removed all her paintings from the gallery, and was never heard from again. The art world had been shocked. Some people believed she had suffered a breakdown. Others thought she had moved abroad. A few conspiracy theories suggested that a wealthy **anonymous** collector had bought her entire collection and demanded that she stop painting. But nobody knew the truth. "She knew Grandma Rose," Nora said to herself, looking at the photographs of the two women together. "They were friends. Close friends." She picked up her phone and called her mother. "Mum, did Grandma ever mention someone called Eleanor Blackwood?"

Chapter 4: The Investigation

The next day at school, Nora told her best friend Jude everything. Jude was exactly the right person for this kind of mystery — he was obsessed with puzzles, **determination** was practically his middle name, and he had a talent for finding information that other people missed. They sat in the library during lunch, scrolling through old newspaper articles. "Look at this," Jude said, turning the screen towards her. It was a photograph from a 1985 newspaper showing Eleanor Blackwood at a gallery opening. Standing next to her, holding a camera and smiling broadly, was a young woman Nora recognised immediately. "That is

Grandma Rose," she said. "She was Eleanor's photographer."

They developed the remaining five rolls of film after school. The photographs revealed more of the friendship between Rose and Eleanor. But the final roll was different. The last twelve photographs showed a large, old house surrounded by overgrown gardens. Some pictures showed the interior — grand but dusty rooms with high ceilings and peeling wallpaper. In several photographs, paintings were visible, propped against walls or hanging in a long corridor. And in the very last photograph, Eleanor Blackwood was standing in the doorway of the house, looking back at the camera with a sad, tired smile. On the back of this photograph, in pencil, someone had written: "Thornfield. November 1986."

Chapter 5: Thornfield Manor

"Thornfield," Jude repeated, already typing the name into his search bar. "Thornfield Manor. It is a real place — and it is only forty minutes from here by bus." He showed Nora the screen. Thornfield Manor was a large Victorian house that had been **abandoned** since the early 1990s. It had originally belonged to a wealthy family, but the last owner had died without any heirs, and the property had been tied up in legal disputes ever since. "That is where she went," Nora said. "Eleanor moved her paintings to Thornfield Manor. That is why nobody could find them."

On Saturday morning, they took the 9:15 bus to the village of Thornfield. The manor was easy to find — it sat at the end of a long driveway lined with ancient oak trees. Up close, it was both beautiful and heartbreaking. The red brick walls were covered in ivy, several windows were broken, and the front garden had been completely taken over by wild plants. A faded sign on the rusty gate read: PRIVATE PROPERTY — NO ENTRY. Jude looked at Nora. Nora looked at Jude. "We are not actually going to break in, are we?" Jude asked. "We are not breaking in," Nora said firmly. "We are investigating. There is a difference." "I am not sure the police would agree with that distinction," Jude muttered, but he followed her through a gap in the hedge anyway.

Chapter 6: The Hidden Gallery

They entered through a side door that was hanging off its hinges. Inside, the manor smelled of damp wood, dust, and something sweet. The entrance hall was impressive even in its ruined state: a wide marble staircase, a cracked chandelier, and walls covered in faded floral wallpaper. They moved carefully from room to room. Most of the furniture had been removed or had collapsed. But there were no paintings. "Maybe someone already found them," Jude said. "Or maybe they are hidden properly," Nora replied. She studied the photographs and noticed a distinctive tree visible through a window. She found the same tree outside. "This way."

They followed the corridor to the east wing. At the end, they found a heavy door with a modern lock. The key was hanging on a small nail behind peeling wallpaper. She turned the key. The door swung open, and both of them stood in stunned silence. Behind the door was a large room prepared to store artwork. Blackout curtains covered the windows. Wooden

shelves held flat packages wrapped in protective cloth. And standing on easels in the centre were six magnificent paintings. Nora felt **overwhelmed**. The paintings were portraits — ordinary people painted with extraordinary colour and emotion. A bus driver with kind eyes. A fisherman mending his nets. A young mother reading to her child. Each face seemed alive.

Chapter 7: The Manuscript

On a small desk in the corner, they found a thick **manuscript** bound in brown leather. It was Eleanor's journal. The first page read: "If you are reading this, then someone has finally found their way here. I hope it is someone who understands." Over the next hour, sitting on the dusty floor of the hidden gallery, Nora and Jude read the entire document. Eleanor's story was not what anyone had expected.

In 1986, Eleanor had discovered that Marcus Webb, the gallery owner, had been planning to sell her entire collection to an **anonymous** private buyer. The deal would have meant Eleanor's paintings would disappear into a private collection forever. When Eleanor refused, Webb threatened to destroy her reputation. "I could not let him win," Eleanor wrote. "These paintings belong to everyone, not to one rich collector who wants to hide them in a vault. So I decided to hide them myself, until the world was ready to see them properly."

With the help of Rose, Nora's grandmother, Eleanor had secretly transported all her paintings to Thornfield Manor, which belonged to Rose's elderly aunt. They had prepared the room together, installing proper storage to protect the artwork. Eleanor had then disappeared from public life, moving to Scotland where she lived quietly under her maiden name. The journal ended: "Rose promised me that one day, when the time was right, someone would come and find these paintings. She said her granddaughter had the same curiosity that we both shared. Rose, if your Nora is reading this, tell her I am grateful. Tell her that some secrets are worth keeping, but only until the right person comes along to set them free."

Chapter 8: The Right Person

Nora closed the journal and sat in silence. "Grandma Rose planned this," she said. "She left me the camera and the film because she knew I would follow the trail." They decided to do this properly. Nora wrote to Eleanor Blackwood, now eighty-one and living in Scotland, and to the National Portrait Gallery in London. Eleanor's reply came ten days later: "I have waited thirty-eight years for this letter. Your grandmother was the bravest and kindest person I ever knew. Yes, you have my permission. It is time for my paintings to come home."

A team of conservators and a **curator** travelled to Thornfield Manor. They spent four days cataloguing every painting. "These are **authentic**," Dr. Sarah Whitfield confirmed. "And their condition is remarkably good." Some paintings needed to be carefully **restored** — the colours had faded slightly. But overall, the collection was in extraordinary condition. Nora thought about Grandma Rose and Eleanor, working together in this room nearly forty years ago.

Chapter 9: The Exhibition

Three months later, the National Portrait Gallery opened a special **exhibition**: "Eleanor Blackwood: The Hidden Collection." It featured all thirty-two paintings, alongside Rose's photographs and the journal. The exhibition was an immediate sensation. Critics described the paintings as "breathtaking." Thousands of visitors queued in the first week. Eleanor travelled to London for the opening and pulled Nora into a hug. "You look just like Rose," she said, her voice trembling.

At the opening ceremony, Eleanor gave a short speech. She thanked the gallery, the conservators, and the press. Then she turned to Nora and Jude. "Most of all, I want to thank these two young people. They proved that art belongs to everyone. It cannot be locked away by wealthy individuals. Art exists to connect us, to remind us that every person's story matters." The audience applauded. Nora felt her cheeks burn. Jude whispered, "I think we just became famous." "Do not let it go to your head," she whispered back.

Chapter 10: Full Circle

Eleanor donated her entire collection to the National Portrait Gallery. She established a scholarship in Rose's name. Thornfield Manor was purchased by a heritage trust and was being restored as an artist's retreat. The hidden gallery room was preserved with a plaque: "Discovered by Nora Chen and Jude Okafor, 2026."

On a quiet Sunday in October, Nora took the bus back to Thornfield alone. The manor looked different now — scaffolding covered the east wing, builders were replacing the roof. But the cedar tree with the split trunk was still standing. She sat beneath it with Grandma Rose's camera in her lap. She had started taking photographs herself — not of famous people, but of ordinary moments. She was learning that the most interesting photographs captured real life. She lifted the camera and took a picture of the manor, with the afternoon sun turning the old red bricks golden. Another photograph for the collection. Another story being told.

The End

*Some stories begin with a discovery, and some stories end with one. But the best stories do both. Nora had discovered her grandmother's secret, and in doing so, she had discovered something about herself: that curiosity is not just a quality — it is a gift. It is the thing that makes us look closer, dig deeper, and refuse to accept that the surface is all there is. Grandma Rose had known this. Eleanor had known it too. And now Nora carried their **legacy** forward, one photograph at a time. The camera clicked. The story continued.*

Part 2 — Key Vocabulary

Words shown in **amber bold** in the story are listed below with their definitions.

Word	Type	Definition
inheritance	<i>noun</i>	money, property, or objects received from someone who has died
vintage	<i>adjective</i>	old and valuable; from the past and of high quality
undeveloped	<i>adjective</i>	not yet processed to show images (photography film)
laboratory	<i>noun</i>	a room equipped for scientific experiments or research
exhibition	<i>noun</i>	a public display of art, objects, or information
portrait	<i>noun</i>	a painting, drawing, or photograph of a person
vanished	<i>verb</i>	disappeared suddenly and completely
prestigious	<i>adjective</i>	respected and admired; having a high reputation
abandoned	<i>adjective</i>	left empty and no longer used or cared for
deteriorating	<i>verb</i>	becoming worse in condition over time
anonymous	<i>adjective</i>	with a name that is not known or not made public
controversy	<i>noun</i>	a public argument about something important
curator	<i>noun</i>	a person who manages a museum or art collection
authentic	<i>adjective</i>	real and genuine; not a copy or fake
overwhelmed	<i>adjective</i>	feeling too many strong emotions at once
restored	<i>verb</i>	brought back to its original condition
legacy	<i>noun</i>	something left behind by someone from the past
manuscript	<i>noun</i>	a handwritten or typed document, especially a book
remarkable	<i>adjective</i>	unusual and surprising in a way that deserves attention
determination	<i>noun</i>	the quality of continuing to try despite difficulties

Part 3 — Comprehension Quiz

Answer these questions about the story. Circle the correct answer.

Question 1

What did Nora find inside the box from her grandmother?

- A) Old letters
- B) A vintage camera and undeveloped film
- C) Paintbrushes
- D) A diary

Question 2

What had Grandma Rose's profession been?

- A) A painter
- B) A journalist
- C) A portrait photographer
- D) A gallery owner

Question 3

Who was featured in all the photographs from the first roll?

- A) Grandma Rose
- B) A famous musician
- C) Eleanor Blackwood
- D) Nora's mother

Question 4

Why did Eleanor disappear from public life in 1986?

- A) She became ill
- B) To protect her paintings from a private sale
- C) She moved abroad
- D) She ran out of money

Question 5

Who was Marcus Webb?

- A) Eleanor's husband
- B) A journalist
- C) The gallery owner who represented Eleanor
- D) A private collector

Question 6

How did Nora find the location of Thornfield Manor?

- A) Her mother told her
- B) She found a map
- C) The last photograph had the name on the back
- D) A neighbour told her

Question 7

What did Nora and Jude find in the locked room?

- A) Empty shelves
- B) Six paintings, wrapped packages, and a journal
- C) Sculptures
- D) Old photographs

Question 8**What did the National Portrait Gallery do with the collection?**

- A) Sold at auction
- B) Stored in a vault
- C) Organised a special public exhibition
- D) Returned to Eleanor

Question 9**What happened to Thornfield Manor?**

- A) Demolished
- B) Converted to flats
- C) Restored as an artist's retreat
- D) Remained abandoned

Question 10**What lesson did Nora learn?**

- A) Old things are always valuable
- B) Curiosity is a gift for discovering hidden truths
- C) Art is only for galleries
- D) Secrets should stay private

Answer Key

#	Ans	Question
1	B	What did Nora find inside the box from her grandmother?
2	C	What had Grandma Rose's profession been?
3	C	Who was featured in all the photographs from the first roll?
4	B	Why did Eleanor disappear from public life in 1986?
5	C	Who was Marcus Webb?
6	C	How did Nora find the location of Thornfield Manor?
7	B	What did Nora and Jude find in the locked room?
8	C	What did the National Portrait Gallery do with the collection?
9	C	What happened to Thornfield Manor?
10	B	What lesson did Nora learn?

Thank you for reading! Visit www.fleydo.com for more stories and materials.