

Zuri's Garden Day

with

Grandma Ruthie









Morning light comes through the window of Grandma Ruthie's house in Texas. Zuri blinks and stretches, and the warm yellow light lands right on her face.

Zuri crawls to the window and presses her nose against the cool glass. Outside, she sees so many colors. Green and blue and yellow and purple, all together in one big patch. Zuri reaches both arms toward the glass, fingers spread wide.





Grandma Ruthie comes in with a smile and holds out her hand. Zuri takes it right away. Grandma Ruthie points to the back door and says, 'Come, little one. Let's see the garden.'

Zuri wants to see every single thing out there. She toddles down the hall beside Grandma Ruthie, her feet patting the floor with each step. The back door is getting closer and closer.





The door opens and warm Texas air wraps around Zuri's face. It smells like dirt and flowers and something sweet she cannot name yet. Zuri steps outside and stops.

In front of her is a sea of blue flowers, low and soft and going all the way to the fence. Zuri reaches her fingers out. Grandma Ruthie kneels beside her and says, 'These are bluebonnets, Zuri. Blue, blue bluebonnets.' Zuri touches one petal, soft as a cloth, and looks up at Grandma Ruthie with a big open smile.





Grandma Ruthie leads Zuri along the path, past the bluebonnets, to where the tall flowers grow. Zuri stops and looks way up. The flowers are as tall as Grandma Ruthie, with round yellow faces and brown centers, like buttons.

Grandma Ruthie says, 'Sunflowers, Zuri. They look at the sun, just like you look at me.' Zuri tilts her face up toward the bright sky. The sun is warm on her cheeks. She holds that pose, just like the flowers do.





Still looking up at the sunflowers, Zuri hears a soft sound beside her.

She looks down. A red ladybug, round as a button, sits on a broad green leaf right next to her shoe. Zuri goes very still. She does not move at all.

Grandma Ruthie whispers, 'Shh. A ladybug. Hello, little ladybug.'

Zuri watches it walk across the leaf, one slow step at a time. Then it opens its wings and lifts away. Zuri raises her hand and waves, just a small wave, as it goes.





Something orange and yellow floats right past Zuri's nose. A butterfly, bright as a flame, dips and lifts through the air. Zuri laughs out loud and takes a wobbly step after it, arms out at her sides.

The butterfly lands on one flower, then another, then another. Zuri follows, giggling each time it moves. Behind her, Grandma Ruthie follows close, clapping her hands softly in a gentle rhythm.





The butterfly floats to the far edge of the garden and lands on a cluster of purple wildflowers. Zuri crouches down and pushes her face close to the blooms. The smell is sweet and a little like rain. She breathes it in.

Grandma Ruthie says the names of the flowers in a soft voice. Zuri tries to say each one back, her mouth making round, babbling sounds. She pats the soil around the stem with her palm. It is cool and a little damp, and it feels good.





A buzzing sound rises up from somewhere nearby. Zuri lifts her head and looks all around. Bees, fat and fuzzy, move from flower to flower in the sun. Their wings beat so fast Zuri cannot see them, only hear them.

Grandma Ruthie says, 'Busy bees, Zuri. They help every flower in the garden.' Zuri watches one bee dip into a bloom and back out again. She sways from side to side, keeping time with the buzzing, as if it is a song just for her.





Grandma Ruthie picks up the watering can from beside the path. She takes Zuri's hand and holds it under the spout, tilting the can so cool water drips onto Zuri's fingers. Zuri giggles and looks at her wet hand.

Grandma Ruthie says, 'This is how plants drink, like you drink from your cup.' She moves the can over a flower and pours slowly. Zuri watches the water run down the petals. She reaches out and touches one, and it shines under her fingertip.





Grandma Ruthie carries Zuri to the sunniest spot in the garden, right where the light falls with no shade at all. The warmth is all around them. Grandma Ruthie stretches her arms up high and says, 'Plants grow up, up, up toward the sun.'

Zuri stretches her own arms as high as they will go, standing on her tiptoes. She and Grandma Ruthie both look up at the sky, arms reaching. Then they both laugh, faces turned to the warm Texas sun.





Back on her own feet now, Zuri spots a flash of red near the garden path. The ladybug is back, sitting on a bluebonnet, just resting. Zuri remembers how still she went before, and she does it again now, all by herself.

She walks toward the flower slowly, one careful step, then another. She stops right beside it and leans in close to look at the red wings with their black spots. The ladybug does not fly away. Zuri stands there, very still, feeling something quiet and proud at the same time.





The ladybug lifts off and Zuri turns back toward the sunflowers. She walks to the nearest one and points up at its big face. A sound comes out of her mouth, something like 'sun-fuh,' her own version of the word.

Grandma Ruthie nods and says, 'Sunflower, yes.' Zuri points again and tries the sound once more. Grandma Ruthie says it back, warm and clear. Zuri beams and points a third time, practicing.





Near the path, Zuri sees the watering can right where Grandma Ruthie set it down. She walks over and wraps both hands around the handle. It is heavy but she holds on. She tilts it toward a flower near her feet and water trickles out.

Grandma Ruthie comes close and guides Zuri's hands so the water falls right at the base of the stem. Zuri watches the soil go dark where the water lands. She says 'Oh,' soft and low, as if something just clicked into place.





A bee lands on the sunflower right beside Zuri. She sees it and goes still, the way she did with the ladybug. She does not step back. She just watches it move across the yellow petals, doing its work.

Zuri turns to Grandma Ruthie and points at the bee. She nods her head slowly, as if to say she already knows. Grandma Ruthie pulls her into a hug and says, 'Yes, little one. Every bug helps.' Zuri pats Grandma Ruthie's arm once, then looks back at the bee.





Zuri stands in the middle of the garden and turns in a slow circle. She points at the bluebonnets, then the sunflowers, then the leaf where the ladybug first sat, then the flowers where the bees are buzzing.

Grandma Ruthie names each one as Zuri points.

Zuri babbles each name back, her voice going up and down with the sounds. Then she claps her hands together, once, twice, three times, and laughs, full of something she does not have a word for yet but feels all the way through.





The sun turns golden and long, and the whole garden glows.
Grandma Ruthie wraps Zuri in a hug right there among the flowers.
Zuri rests her head on Grandma Ruthie's shoulder, one hand still
pointing at a butterfly drifting past. The bees hum. The bluebonnets
and sunflowers stand tall in the late light.

Zuri's eyes grow heavy. She breathes in the smell of the garden, the
same sweet smell that met her at the door this morning. She sighs,
slow and soft, her fingers still curled toward the flowers she now
knows by heart.



The end



The more that you read, the more things you will know



Little Zuri visits Grandma Ruthie's garden in Texas for the very first time and wants to know every flower, bug, and buzzing bee she sees. Hand in hand, they meet bluebonnets and sunflowers, watch a ladybug walk across a leaf, and follow a butterfly through the blooms. Grandma Ruthie shows Zuri how plants drink water and grow toward the sun, and how every bee helps the garden grow. By the end of a golden afternoon, Zuri knows the garden by heart and loves it completely.

