

Shiny Black Berries

Penelope was a lively girl, filled with curiosity and a desire for adventure.

One warm, sunny day, she awoke with joy in her heart. She had been looking forward to this day, and the days that were to follow. It was harvest time—the time the trees bore their delicious fruit and the bushes were alive with color and were covered with juicy berries. Everything was beautiful! And today was the day when they would begin the much-loved chore of collecting fruit and berries from the nearby forest.

For the past few weeks, her friends and she had worked hard to weave new baskets in preparation for this season. Every year, they'd prepare in this way, always looking forward to autumn. The boys from the village would accompany the men on hunting trips and would also collect honey from the beehives. The girls would forage, as well as help their mothers cook and prepare the food, drying and preserving some of the fruit they collected for use in the months to come.




"Come, children. Let's wash up in the river and prepare for the busy day ahead of us," Penelope's mother said, as the children scrambled out of bed and ran to the river's edge. This was their daily routine, but they rarely performed this simple task with such enthusiasm as they did today. They ate their breakfast and did their chores quickly, eager to begin their day's work.

The village square consisted of a little monument made of stone and a few rocks surrounding a few plants and flowers. Penelope met up with her friends there. Each of them brought along their treasured collection of newly woven baskets. After a quick greeting, they made their way to an area where there were an abundance of fruit trees and berry bushes.

"I'll start over here," one of the girls said.

"And I'll begin there," another chimed in. They all made their way to different trees or bushes, and began diligently picking.





"I'll start with the berries," Penelope said to herself, as she made her way over to the bushes that spread almost as far as her eye could see.

There were certain fruits and berries that were good to eat, and there were certain fruits and berries that her mother had told her they could not eat. Some of the different plants, berries, and fruits around were poisonous; others just didn't have a good flavor. In the beginning, Penelope's mother used to come with Penelope and her sisters to show them what to pick and what not to pick, but now that they were a little older, Mother trusted them to do the job on their own.

Her mother had told her that most of the berries were good, but that there was a certain black, shiny berry that they should never eat. Penelope had often wondered what that berry tasted like, and she didn't think eating it would do her any real harm.





Penelope was picking all the good berries she could find when she came to a bush that had those shiny black berries her mother had warned her about. *What if I try just one?* she thought. *Mother will never know. They look so delicious, and every year I'm tempted to eat them. Maybe nobody has ever really tasted them. Maybe we're missing out on a delicious berry. They do look awfully tasty...*

She picked one of the berries, studied it for a moment, and then put it in her mouth. It didn't taste so bad. Penelope decided to eat another, and then another, and another. But she didn't tell any of her friends what she had done.

After a long, but fun day's work, shortly before the sun was beginning to set, they started out for home. By this time, though, Penelope was beginning to feel quite sick. *Maybe I shouldn't have eaten those berries after all, she thought. I'm feeling terrible, and it seems to be getting worse. What am I going to tell Mother?*



"Mother," Penelope blurted as soon as she was through the door, "I know I shouldn't have, but I ate some of those berries you told us not to eat. Now I feel awful! And I'm so sorry I ate them."

"Oh, dear," Mother said, looking concerned. "I am happy you told me, but I'm sorry you are feeling unwell. Those berries are known to cause an upset tummy, which is why I warned you to not eat them..."

Penelope's tummy was very upset for the next few days, and she missed out on some yummy meals that her mother made for her family. She also missed the beginning of the harvesting season that she had so been looking forward to.

Penelope got better and learned her lesson too.

Next year, when harvesting season came around again, Penelope was eager to point out to her younger sisters the berry bush they were to stay away from, telling them about what happened to her.

