

Scarlet Gamble

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Chapter 1 - The Rumor

Eli had learned the taste of empty plates, the hollow ache of a stomach that never forgot the hunger it carried. The tavern smelled of stale ale and wood smoke, a familiar mixture that marked the passing hours, yet he clung to it like a lifeline. Men huddled over mugs, whispering about things too valuable for ordinary folk to touch: **Scarlet Blooms**, glowing flowers that were worth **\$500 each**. Their petals shimmered red like embers in a dying fire, and the chefs of the city would pay handsomely for even a single bloom.

Eli imagined it. The money crinkling between his fingers, a loaf of bread that didn't vanish in a day, a roof that didn't leak, a coat that smelled of warmth instead of smoke and dust. Ten flowers could wipe away every debt, every slight, every sleepless night. One flower, just one, could feed him for weeks.

The tavern men laughed at stories of those who had ventured into the valley and never returned. Others came back empty-handed, battered and bruised, their dreams buried in the cracked soil along with their dignity. Eli pressed his palm against the wall, feeling the coarse wood. His fingers trembled. He knew the risks, knew the danger, but the thought of inaction burned hotter.

The thought of not trying was unbearable. "*Today, I go.*" He whispered it to himself as if saying it aloud could make it real. Luck favors the bold. He would be bold. Today, he would take the risk.

Chapter 2 - The Valley

The valley stretched before him like an ocean of cracked earth. Every step sent up dust that clung to his boots, coiling around his ankles, scratching his skin. Dry grass bent in the wind, rustling like brittle paper. Stones, pale and jagged, were scattered across the land, as though the ground itself had rejected them. The air smelled faintly of dust, sunbaked soil, and a bitter tang that reminded him of old sweat. But he needed the blooms, so he pressed forward determined

Hours passed in silence. Every sound - the cry of a distant bird, the whistle of wind through a hollow in the rocks - made his pulse surge. Sweat ran down his neck, stinging his eyes. And then he saw them, in all their glory: Scarlet Blooms, scattered across the earth like spilled rubies, glowing faintly in the morning light.

His chest tightened. He stumbled forward over loose stones and roots, every nerve alive with anticipation and excitement. The money flashed before his mind's eye: meals, a roof, a coat, comfort, security. He imagined himself clutching one flower, then ten. The thought made his pulse quicken. One flower would be enough to feed him, ten would change everything. All his money problems would be solved in one swoop.

Chapter 3 - The Fall

He knelt to pluck a flower, holding it to his eyes with a smile from cheek to cheek. The soil beneath his knees shivered once suddenly. Then, out of nowhere the earth swallowed him whole, a sinkhole opened.

Eli fell, tumbling end over end. Wind ripped past his ears. Darkness swallowed him. His body slammed into the dirt at the bottom of a pit, pain bursting in his shoulders, ribs, and legs. Every muscle screamed. Dirt filled his mouth. He tasted blood. He groaned, winded and bruised, his body aching in every direction. He was trapped, at the bottom of a seemingly endless pit.

Above, the flowers glimmered faintly, impossible to reach. No bones were broken, yet every movement hurt. Every breath reminded him of his mistake. He lay on the ground, staring up at the small circle of sky, whispering to himself, *"I can get out. I must get out."*

Chapter 4 - The First Climb

He pressed his hands to the wall. Loose soil slid away under his fingers, jagged rocks cutting his palms. He shoved his boots into every crack, tried to brace himself, to shimmy upward. Each attempt ended in failure, each slide leaving his knees scraped raw and blood staining the dirt.

He tried to climb sideways, pressing his body to the wall for friction, rocking back and forth like a desperate animal. Every motion sent a shower of dirt cascading down. Frustration coiled inside him, tightening like a rope around his chest. Each failure only made him more determined.

Hours passed, sunlight shifting overhead, burning his back. His lips cracked, hands bleeding, muscles trembling. The ground below seemed to mock him. And still he whispered, “*almost. almost.*” One more attempt, one more. He could not stop himself.

Chapter 5 - Improvised Tools

Near him lay a broken branch, snagged in a crevice. He grabbed it, hoping to hook the edge of the pit, to pull himself up with leverage. It snapped instantly, splintering against the rim. Rocks that might have helped crumbled at the slightest touch.

He pressed on, climbing inch by inch. Sweat ran into his eyes; dust coated his skin. Every movement brought sharp pain. He wedged his boots into tiny rocks jutting from the wall, pulling with arms that shook with exhaustion. The pit felt alive, resistant, punishing him for every misstep. He was determined to get out, it's all that mattered right now.

Chapter 6 - The Body's Limits

By afternoon, Eli's body trembled. Every joint screamed. His legs quivered. Hands raw and bleeding. He tried a running leap to reach a ledge, scraping shoulders and hips, but gravity was relentless. Pain radiated in waves through him. He lived in constant fear that one misstep would be the domino that buried him in this pit.

And still he whispered to himself: "*Almost... almost...*" His mind was no longer focused on the flowers, but on the struggle itself, on the tension of the climb, on the impossible. His obsession had become a craving. Rest would feel like surrender. Surrender was unthinkable. He needed to get out of this pit; this would not be his grave.

Chapter 7 - The Final Morning Push

Morning came, pale and cold. He decided to make one last climb, it's about all the energy he had left. He decided to give it everything he had. Inch by inch he worked his way up the pit, feet on one side, back pressed against the other. Eventually, Eli spotted a tiny projection in the soil - a small foothold, just enough to take his weight. Slowly, carefully, he wedged a boot into the crack, pressed his palms against the jutting rock, and with one final heave, pulled himself over the edge of the pit.

He collapsed onto the dirt, gasping, trembling, every bruise alive with pain. He laid on his side for a moment taking deep breaths, looking at his outstretched arm. There is his hand, somehow, he had managed to preserve, one Scarlet Bloom. One flower. Enough to taste victory, enough to prove he had succeeded. Blood, sweat, and pain - but also triumph.

Chapter 8 - The Wind and Temptation

He lay on the ground, trying to calm his racing heart. When suddenly, a gust of wind swept across the valley. It was refreshing at first, a gust of clean oxygen to the lungs, drying the sweat on his body. But then he noticed, a few more flowers, previously clinging to the rim, gently flew past his face and drifted back into the bottom of the pit.

The rest of the field had been buried in the soil collapse. Only those few petals remained, red against brown. Eli held the single flower tight. It was enough to change his life. But he could not look away. His eyes followed the flowers back into the pit, imagining the wealth below. One more... just a few more. Sure, he had one flower, but a few more could change his life.

Chapter 9 - The Return

He looked around, found some old vine on the ground and tied it to a root sticking out near the pits edge. He lowered himself into the pit, whispering, "*Just these few... then I'm done.*" Hands scraped dirt, boots slipped, soil groaning under his weight.

And then the wall gave way. Dirt and rock cascaded down, burying him instantly. Pain tore through every bruise, every exhausted muscle. The flowers were crushed beneath the avalanche. The pit had claimed him again - this time, completely. There was no pit, no sunlight, no air. It swallowed him entirely along with his fortune of Scarlet Blooms.

Chapter 10 - Silence

The valley returned to stillness. A soft wind drifted across the flattened earth. Birds circled above, indifferent. From an onlooker's perspective, it was simply a sinkhole with no life around. Mother nature running her course, just another day to its endless cycle of destruction and rebirth.

At the rim, a single Scarlet Bloom lay crushed in the dirt. Nothing else remained. There would be no screams, no attempts to get out, this time it was over. Dust drifted lazily across the cracked ground. The pit was silent. Eli was gone. The gamble was over.

Author's Thoughts

This story is about chasing something you want so badly, even when you know it could destroy you. Eli's pit is more than a hole in the ground-it's the kind of trap desire and addiction can create. We all have things we gamble for: money, approval, love and luck. Sometimes the risk is worth it. Sometimes it's not. And sometimes, even when we win, we can't stop ourselves from going back in.