

Trial by Weed

GILDA WAS SO TIRED of weeding the garden. How tiny-small the dainty little plants; how very big the husky weeds! The plants, Gilda thought, were little girls; the weeds were boys laughing at them. There were so very many boy-weeds.

“I hate boys—I mean weeds,” she cried aloud. “I wish there were no weeds at all, anywhere.”

It was such a little voice, she scarce heard it at first. It might have been a pearly drop of dew sliding on a blade of grass. But it grew louder. A pleasant voice, now, like silvery water tinkling over brook stones. Gilda looked, wide-eyed, toward the sound. And there she beheld an elfin creature. Her gown was shimmering blue, her hair a captured sunbeam, her eyes the color of wood moss. As Gilda stared, the creature seemed to grow, larger and larger—or could it be that Gilda shrank, smaller and smaller? The creature smiled and held out a teeny hand.

“Come,” she ordered.

Gilda, still bewildered, took the hand. Then she felt herself floating, lightly as feather down. For what might have been, a second or an hour, Gilda felt herself floating in a luminous light. All at once the pressure on her hand was released and she felt herself standing still. She opened her eyes and looked about.

She was in a glade in a forest. The trees were unlike any trees she had ever seen—feathery and green and tall, towering far into the sky, with a

fantastic white crown. Why, if it were not absurd, she would think she was in a forest of Queen Anne’s Lace. Warm sunlight slanted through the wispy branches. Then Gilda saw that all around her were people, but such people as she had never before seen.

Some wore gowns of yellow, and some wore red, pale purple, deep green, bright orange. Some wore baggy trousers of brown, with quaint shoes of mossy color, But the hair—that was outlandish. Everybody, boys and girls alike, had green hair, as though grass were growing from their tiny heads.

While she was still staring at them she felt a light touch on her arm, and saw her guide.

“You must get ready for the trial, the elfin girl told her in the silver-tinkle voice.

“What trial?” Gilda asked, surprised.

Then one of the figures rose. He had been seated at the base of a Queen Ann’s Lace tree, and Gilda saw that atop his green hair was a golden crown. He spoke in a deep voice like an old, weathered bell.

“Bring forth the prisoner.”

The elfin girl led Gilda along the soft, velvet moss of the glade till she stood before the King. He looked at her sternly through yellow eyes.

“What is the charge?” the King demanded.

“She said she hated weeds,” the elf girl said. Then, all about her, Gilda heard a murmur that grew louder and louder, till it sounded like rain beating hard on the roof, and all the figures moved in toward her in a circle. She shrank back, frightened, though somehow she knew she would not be



Rose Fairy

Cecely Barker

harmed. There was more sorrow than anger in the voices.

At that the King grew very stern indeed, and put his hand to his head, and all the figures retreated.

“And she said she wished there were no weeds at all,” the elf girl went on.

Then the sound of voices grew still louder and again the tiny figures approached Gilda in a circle. She looked wildly about her.

The King seemed to stand a full inch taller now in his astonishment. This time he clapped his hand to his head and all the figures grew silent and fell back.

“Bring on the witnesses,” called the King.

Up stepped a wizened little man. He wore black and yellow garments and his face—why, his face was that of a humble bee. Gilda looked at him closely.

“I am Bumble,” the faded little man said. “I am in charge of procuring honey from the weeds. When all other blooms have gone, I direct my charges to the weeds for sweet nectar and food. Without the weeds my people would perish.”

He stepped back then and immediately another figure took his place, and from a distance came a faint voice and hippity-hop came a second figure. All white he was, with pink shoes and certainly, a rabbit face. He turned and bowed to his companion, a mousy, grey little man. Gilda could not recognize him by name, though she had seen him before somewhere.

“I am Bunny,” said the second figure.

“I am Bob White,” cried the first figure.

“I live among the weeds, went on Bunny. “They offer me shelter. They shield me from my enemies.”

“I eat the berries and fruit of the weeds,” said Bob White. “When the snow spreads over the land like a blanket, the weeds give me food and comfort.”

Bunny and Bob White melted into the crowd of

silent little figures.

Gilda would have laughed at the next figure had she not been so frightened. He was tall and skinny and wore a black cap over his green hair, like a boy who is being punished by the teacher. All his clothes were tight and black, and silver buckled. His face was sharp and rather bitter.

“I am Boneset,” he rasped in a harsh voice. “Perhaps the prisoner has partaken of my tea I.”

Everybody laughed then, a sound like a thousand beads bumping together. Gilda shivered. She had taken Boneset Tea for a cold. How disagreeable it was. Yet her mother said it had helped her get over the cold.

Somebody else had joined Boneset. He was brown and lanky, with a pointed, comical face.

“I am Hoarhound. I am made into drops that kids eat like candy, but I am really a medicine.”

Gilda was confused now and felt like crying. She was tired and wanted to lie down on the ground and shut out all the strange figures and sounds.

Just then she saw the elf girl step before the King.

“I represent all the Weeds,” said the elf girl. “We are really plants. We furnish food and shelter to bees and the wild creatures of meadow and wood. We furnish pasture to Moo-Moo, the cow, we give to the fields minerals and vitamins. We give to man medicine and oils and sometimes food.

We are called weeds when we go where we are not wanted. But garden plants were once called weeds until man found use for them. Without us the garden could not grow, though we are really weeds when we invade the garden.

I do not think Gilda should be judged for hoeing us up when we were where we did not belong. But she must be judged for her awful wish about us.”

“Hear, hear,” cried everybody.



A Grass Elf



Fay Terrell

Gwen Stafford

Once again the King stood up. He gazed at Gilda, but not unkindly.

“I think the prisoner did not understand what she said. She deserves a second chance. However, on the charge as filed we must find her guilty.”

“Guilty, guilty,” everybody chorused.

“Gilda, Gilda.”

The little girl saw that her mother was standing in the doorway, calling her. Gilda shook her head in confusion.

“What—what is wrong, Mother?”

“Daydreaming again,” her mother lamented. “Daydreaming in that hot sun. It’s enough to make you see things. Perhaps you had better finish weeding when it is cooler.”

Gilda looked about her at the garden. “Perhaps I had,” she said absently. “I want to read some about weeds.”

Her mother smiled and shook her head softly. Little girls were strange creatures—one never could be quite sure of what they were thinking. □

—B. Coursin Black

TO CAPTURE BEAUTY

She tries to capture Beauty
in her dimpled fingers;
I’ve seen her at it many times—
my small maiden-child.
To enfold the wonder of the firefly
when at evenlight
it winks its velvet gold
across the white moss rose;
to imprison the winged beauty
of the hummingbird as it darts
from bleeding heart to columbine;
or the sea-foam’s painted bubbles;
or the luminous moonbeam
on magnolia petals.
How can she know, who is so young
that opened hand and touch so light
alone make Beauty’s wings cease flight?

—Mary Helen Lawson

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