

To War Each Day...

The first barrage of artillery pattered against the bedroom window, startling Michael awake. He rolled over and hugged his wife Rebecca trying to ignore it. Another attack of pebbles clattering on the window before he could close his eyes.

“I thought you were going to put up screens?” Rebecca grumbled, rolling onto her stomach.

“I think Saser the Nimble cut them out in the middle of the night again...” Michael said.

“If they keep at this we’re going to need to replace the window...”

“They’re completely unreasonable...I’m going to talk to them again.”

Michael sighed and climbed out of bed as another catapult attack bounced off the glass. Looking out the window, Michael saw the miniaturized army marching out of the woods. Legions of tiny soldiers, marched out of the woods in columns their spear tips pointing up out of the tall grass. The wood sprites reloaded catapults drawn by mounted squirrels for another attack on the house. Their tiny drums and flutes were inaudible, but Michael was sure the quiet song was bolstering the cheering army. What started as an attempt to keep the weeds from strangling the tomatoes became into a war with the wood sprites.

Poking his head out the window, Michael waved a white handkerchief out the window. “Fine friends,” he grumbled, wiping his eyes, “care to negotiate a truce?”

As the wind shook the trees, Michael heard the faint voice of General Ronfiz the Bold shouting up to him. “Finally ready to surrender?”

“Not yet, but I’m willing to make some concessions in exchange for a weekly ceasefire.”

“Very well!” General Ronfiz the Bold shouted up in his high, squeaky voice. “To the Neutral Zone! And no tricks!”

“Wouldn’t dream of it...” Michael said, closing the window and putting his robe on. “Do you mind putting on the coffee? If I’m doing peace talks, I’d like some caffeine.”

“I’ll get the coffee maker going,” Rebecca sat up and ran her fingers through her ponytail. “Can’t you ask him what he wants? I’m getting tired of these negotiations every morning.”

“I’ve tried, but we’ve been at this for months. General Ronfiz is more difficult to negotiate with than freelancers! The only thing he says will bring a truce is if we pack up and leave. We can’t afford that right now and you won’t let me fight back.”

“It doesn’t seem sporting,” Rebecca said. “Besides, I’m not willing to keep our house at the price of genocide.”

“Well, then if we want them to leave, I’m going to have to keep arguing with them.”

“I’d settle for sleeping on Saturday mornings.”

“I’ll see if he’s willing to acquiesce...”

“Thank you,” Rebecca said, putting her slippers on. Michael walked downstairs to negotiate a potential ceasefire with the general of the wood sprite war party.

The whole situation had started with Rebecca’s desire to have a garden. They had just bought the

house and there was a large, sunny yard surrounded by tall trees. The couple who'd lived there—a pair of snowbirds looking to permanently retire down to Florida—had advised them to keep the yard untouched. Michael had figured they had paid enough for the house to decide what to do with their new yard. He and Rebecca had started growing flowers and vegetables within a week of moving into their home. It didn't strike Michael as enough to start a war, but the conflict with the wood sprites had only gotten worse.

Michael walked out to the patio and sat on the steps. General Ronfiz the Bold had declared that the Neutral Zone, since he couldn't climb the steps to the patio table. The formal-looking assembly of a dozen wood sprites waded through the out of control lawn. Each soldier was only six inches tall and decked out in green armor made of grass. Each one carried a spear or sword made out of twigs and stone. General Ronfiz the Bold rode on his squirrel mount, puffing out his chest and trying to look taller as he approached Michael.

“Michael the Titanic!” General Ronfiz the Bold hopped off his squirrel and approached, passing off the reins to another soldier. The sprite's skin was a light, robin's egg blue with jet-black eyes and smooth hair the color of dandelion fuzz. “Are you finally willing to surrender your land to the wood sprites?”

“We've talked about this,” Michael grimaced. “We have no intention of leaving. I'm afraid we're just going to have to try and find a way to live with one another.”

“Very well! What terms have you come to ask of us?”

“Rebecca and I are asking for a ceasefire before nine on Saturdays,” Michael said. “We wake up most days to go to work, it'd be nice to have a day or two when we could sleep.”

“You poison our people and now you ask for peace and quiet?”

“I've explained it a hundred times! We didn't know that the wood sprites were taking the vegetables. We just put down a weed killer to protect our tomatoes. We didn't think that someone as small as a wood sprite would eat them.”

“It killed dozens of wood sprites!”

“If a squirrel had eaten it, there wouldn't be enough poison to kill it!” Michael snapped. He caught his temper quickly. “Look, we didn't know that the wood sprites were taking the food. And we apologized for that...”

“Ignorance does not excuse the crime! However, we're willing to stop the fighting if you accept our demands!”

“We're not going to move,” Michael said. “You already won't let me mow the lawn or—“

“And every time you replace the tires on your war machine we'll destroy them again!”

“Believe me, I've stopped trying,” Michael said. “Look, we just want our yard back.”

“Oh, Michael the Titanic,” General Ronfiz the Bold scoffed, pacing dramatically, “the yard was never yours! The Elder Madisons, who lived in harmony with us before you, knew that and respected our way of life. We didn't wander into their yard because our foragers weren't drawn by food left out for the taking! After such a difficult winter, how could we resist the promise of a bountiful harvest!”

“Listen,” Michael said, “we didn’t even think you existed. Rebecca just wanted to plant a garden. We didn’t think that would lead to a war...”

“And the wood sprites haven’t gone to war in almost a hundred years! Yet, here we are.”

“Look, let’s focus on our current discussion. What would it take for you to give us one day a week to sleep a little later.”

General Ronfiz the Bold grumbled and paced a little more, rubbing his chin. “Well, since the war started, you have proven to be a worthy adversary—“

“Mostly by accident, mind you.”

“And I respect a noble warrior’s plight. I will offer this: On your ‘Saturday Mornings’, we will declare a ceasefire until the sun is at its highest point. In exchange, you will give us an area of twenty-four strides by twenty-four strides of your yard for our territory.”

Michael sighed and rubbed his eyes. “May I confer with my counsel?”

“I’ll allow it,” the wood sprite general folded his arms and glared.

Michael stood, towering over the small assembly and back into the house. Rebecca was sipping coffee and chewing on some toast at the kitchen counter. Michael joined her with a cup of coffee, mixing in a bit of sugar.

“They want another two square feet...” Michael said. “What do you think?”

“What about that section behind the shed?” Rebecca said, chewing her toast.

“I think there’s a wasp nest out there,” Michael sighed. “The last thing I want is to give them aerial capability.”

“What about the garage?” Rebecca asked.

“I wouldn’t put it out of their ability to cut our brakes,” Michael said. “Besides, I don’t like them that close to the house.”

Michael pulled out the map he’d drawn of the backyard. It was heavily marked up with pencil a dozen times as the edge of the wood sprite territory pushed further and further toward the house. “Unless we want them to be within easy range of the house? We might have to give them the garden...”

“The whole garden?”

“Half of it, at least,” Michael frowned. “Thoughts?”

“This is getting ridiculous! I’m putting an end to this.” Rebecca set her coffee aside and picked up two slices of toast. She stood and walked out to the patio, padding onto the deck in her bare feet and pajamas. Michael followed after her as she towered over the wood sprites. The soldiers panicked, pointing their spears upwards and snarling as Rebecca sat on the steps.

“General Ronfiz, I assume?” Rebecca said. “I’m familiar with your work...”

“And who are you?” General Ronfiz the Bold said, raising his sword towards her. “A witch of Michael the Titanic? We’ve contended with witches before and we will—“

“I’m not a witch,” Rebecca smiled, warmly. “I’m Rebecca and this is also my house that you’re

attacking...and my garden. I've come to negotiate a peace since you and my husband can't seem to come to an arrangement. I'm hoping we can come to an agreement."

The soldiers looked tense for a minute until General Ronfiz the Bold slid his blade back into the sheath at his hip. "Very well, Rebecca the Fair," the wood sprite general nodded. "I suppose another representative from the opponent might lead to more successful reasoning. It would be better than repeating the same arguments. What are your terms?"

"Alright," Rebecca said. "Here's a proposal for a truce to end this—for good! Once a month, you can send your harvesters here and we'll give them half of the goods in our garden. In exchange, you give us back our yard. Deal?"

General Ronfiz the Bold staggered back, surprised by the bluntness of Rebecca's speech. He recovered long enough to bow formally at the waist and clearing his throat. "That...that would be acceptable, my lady. I will have to confer with others in the woods, but I think that we all want an end to this skirmish."

"And we get the yard back?"

"Signal a retreat!" General Ronfiz the Bold told one of his soldiers. "We've reached an arrangement with Rebecca the Fair!"

"Thank you," Rebecca sighed. "And, as a sign of peace, may I offer you a piece of toast?"

"We have a mighty large army, my lady."

"Two pieces then," Rebecca said, offering both slices of bread. "Do we have a deal?"

"Agreed," the wood sprite knocked his spear against the concrete and four wood sprites came forward to carry the toast slices back to their troops.

"We'll need a little while to get everything together," Rebecca said. "Come by in a month and we'll have the first offering for the wood sprite clans. Consider the toast a sign of peace."

"We look forward to your first offering," General Ronfiz the Bold hopped onto his squirrel and took the reins from his man on the ground. "Until next month! To the woods!"

General Ronfiz the Bold nudged his squirrel's ribs and the animal reared before retreating. There was a loud rustle as the wood sprite army retreated far back. The retreating army shook the grass of the overgrown lawn, like the tide going out to sea. After a moment, everything was still and Rebecca let out a deep breath. "Thank God," she whispered. "I thought this would never end..."

"What made you sure he would take the deal?"

"Well, I feel like we never...asked!" Rebecca said, standing. "Whenever you two would start it would just turn into a shouting match, so I thought I would suggest something we hadn't tried. They only came here in the first place by the prospect of food, so I thought offering what they want would put an end to the senseless violence. Besides, we don't need it to survive. We can just go to the store if we need anything else."

"I guess I was too worried about my pride," Michael said. "I never thought they'd settle for anything

less than everything we had.”

“Well, they’re wood sprites,” Rebecca said. “I guess nature doesn’t take more than it needs to. Trees only take the sunlight they need, flowers take only the water they need to grow...nature takes what it needs to survive and nothing more. Taking excess is a very human trait.”

“I guess I’m more used to fighting human battles...”

“Refreshing to see actually see a war end,” Rebecca said. “And to think, all it took was a promise and a few pieces of toast.”

“Were those for you or for me?” Michael asked.

“I ended a war with the wood sprites,” Rebecca said. “The least you can do is make your own breakfast.”