

Survival By Delores J Goossen

The spring was green and perfect. The sun shone warm, rains fell; the gardener smiled as he worked. The flowers in the garden grew lush and vibrant....and perfect. Lilies, roses, peonies, begonias, coleus, baby's breath, they all grew and thrived just where they were planted. The gardener inspected and trimmed the plants daily, sprayed for bugs, and kept the earth black and mulched around their feet. The paths winding through the beds were neat and orderly.

Beside the garden shed a dandelion emerged from the soil and waved its leaves. It pushed up a brilliant yellow bloom, flung it open toward the sky and cried, "Yay!" The tiger lily frowned and looked to see if any of the others had noticed. "Where did you come from?" he questioned haughtily, "You don't belong here." The rose lifted an eyebrow. "How uncouth," murmured the astilbe, "flaunting itself like that." The gardener walked past the shed to find the wheelbarrow and stopped suddenly. "How did you get here?" he asked. "You're not supposed to be growing here." He scuffed at the dandelion with his heavy work shoe until the bloom lay broken in the dirt. The tiger lily smiled at the astilbe, who nodded back.

The days grew warmer, and the rain continued to fall. Beside the garden shed the dandelion emerged from the soil again and waved its leaves. It pushed up a brilliant yellow bloom, flung it open toward the sky and cried, "Yay!" The tiger lily started and stared. The astilbe frowned. The begonia said to the baby's breath, "How bold, calling attention to itself like that. It doesn't belong here." The little Johnny jump ups which were allowed to grow around the tool shed, leaned close and whispered, "We love your bright yellow color. It makes us happy."

The gardener bent to fill his watering can and stared. "What are you doing in my flower garden? You don't belong here." He took his hoe and slashed at the dandelion. The leaves and bloom lay in the hot sun, wilting quickly. The begonia nodded approvingly. The tiger lily sniffed. "So presumptuous," he said. The Johnny jump ups sighed.

The days grew hot, the sun poured down into the garden. Beside the garden shed the dandelion emerged from the soil again and waved its leaves. It pushed up a brilliant yellow bloom, flung it open toward the sky and cried, "Yay!" The tiger lily gasped in dismay. The baby's breath pursed her lips. "How very bold," she said. "So forward and unbecoming," agreed the rose, tsk tsking. "It doesn't belong here," they said together. The gardener looked cross. "You again?" he said. "You, weed, you." He took a garden shovel and cut the dandelion off below the dirt. He picked it up and threw it outside the garden. The Johnny jump ups bowed their heads.

Many days passed, the nights became cooler. The flowers put out fewer blooms. The tiger lily looked at the rose and said, "Well, it looks like the dandelion finally learned." "Yes, thankfully," said the rose. "It was embarrassing how it kept showing its face, and being so loud about it." But beside the garden shed the dandelion slowly emerged from the soil again and feebly waved its leaves. It struggled as it pushed up a brilliant yellow bloom, opened it toward the sky and said hoarsely, "Yay!" "What?" said rose in disbelief. "What?" said the begonia and astilbe together. "What are you thinking?" asked the tiger lily. "You don't belong here." "Honestly," said the baby's breath, "how low class to keep coming up where it doesn't belong. Why doesn't it grow with the others like it over in the meadow?" The Johnny jump ups clapped their leaves and reached toward the dandelion. "We've been watching for you." Several days went by before the gardener saw the dandelion, which by now had sent up a second flower. He stared in disbelief. "I took care of you long ago. What are you doing here again? You don't belong here." He mixed up some special brew; he sprayed it on the dandelion. It stung. He sprayed a lot, so that

the leaves dripped and the ground around it became soaked. The dandelion shuddered and started curling her leaves. The Johnny jump ups whispered, "Don't go," and then covered their eyes and shivered. The tiger lily and astilbe, the baby's breath and roses nodded to each other. The begonia said, "That's what comes of having no shame."

The days grew shorter and the nights colder. The gardener picked the last blooms from the flowers. He spread straw in the garden to keep the roots and bulbs warm during the cold season. He put away his tools. He looked at the withered brown leaves of the dandelion and smiled. "That should fix it," he said. "Next year we shouldn't have any trouble."

Down among its roots the dandelion was very still. The spray had soaked down and made its sides sting. "I don't know," it said to itself, "I just don't know. Maybe what they said is true. Maybe I really don't belong. I don't know why not. I'm a flower just like the rest of them. Yet there must be something wrong with me, since they say I don't belong." The effects of the spray made its thinking slow, but the one thought that kept circling was, "They say I don't belong." It went around so often that the dandelion finally felt it must be true. "I don't belong," it kept saying to itself. Its roots shrivelled. It gave a big, big sigh and its head drooped. "I guess it's true," it whispered faintly, "I guess there'll be no more dancing in the sun for me. I don't belong." And the winter was long and cold.

Eventually the days grew longer, the sun warmer, the clouds started swelling with droplets. One day the rain began falling, warm and encouraging. The garden soaked it up; then the sun poured down its warm golden rays. The gardener smiled and started raking up the straw, watching for little green shoots. Down among its roots, the dandelion lifted its head feebly. The old dirge began again, "I don't belong here...I don't belong here...I don't belong here. There is something wrong with me. I don't know what to do. I don't know where to go...I don't belong here."

Something warm and refreshing was running over its head and down its sides and washing away the sting. "I wonder," said the dandelion, "I wonder what's happening." Its roots stirred and swelled. It thought for a long, long time. "Who decides I don't belong here?" it finally asked itself. "Who says?" it repeated. "I'm a flower just like the rest of them. Remember the Johnny jump ups who loved to see me grow?" The dandelion gave itself a good shake, wiggled the ends of its roots and took a deep breath. Everywhere in the garden green shoots were poking up. The robins sang, the Johnny jump ups burst from the earth.

And beside the garden shed the dandelion emerged from the soil and waved its leaves. It pushed up a brilliant yellow bloom, flung it open toward the sky and cried, "Yay!"