

Absinthe Minded

These sort of days aggravated Constable Bell's dyspepsia. The blooming season brought its annual onslaught of property disputes and lovers' quarrels to the station. But the Fées Vertes brought, well, more urban problems to the Bois Blanc precinct.

Over the past few years, Canterbury Bell had witnessed more human writers, uninspired by their city surroundings, venturing wide-eyed to the woods. And with more aspiring artists comes a certain kind of fairy. Frankly, a fairy tough for even Bell to tame. The Fées Vertes showed little respect for woodland conventions. They played wild and late, dressed in little more than wisps of fog, and mercilessly teased the local boys. In fact, the same talent to which gave muse to artists and authors also seduced imps, elves, and sprites. As well as other creatures. Things always ended badly—the defenestration of adversaries, rent petals, and tears. And the Vertes, capricious by nature, would tire of the attentions of their new plaything and seek the protection of Bell's office from stalking. This is how the rule of law came to be.

The Bois Blanc station, adeptly run by Constable Canterbury Bell, simply did not have the bandwidth to handle other creature crimes. Even if an elfin boy was found to be overly rough with a fairy paramour, it was tough to tell what kind of magic would keep him in his cell. And if a troll or goblin, or (heaven's sake) a squirrel, were charged, the fairy station could not hold him. It wasn't miscegenation, just practicality. The station at its tallest point was five inches-three. So, Kingcup Fairy and Queen-of-the-Meadow ordered a rule be established outside the door. A human measuring-stick was enchanted and planted in the ground. Creatures more than four inches tall could not be detained, merely banished from the fairy ring. While this kept Bell's cells free for fairy perpetrators, it encouraged the mischievous Vertes to make many and more claims. Once tired of certain affection, or annoyed by a pretty garden-variety rival, the Vertes sought quick dispatch.

Though he realized that often they were truly in trouble, Bell had little sympathy for the Vertes. This day, he was settling a dispute between the unrelated fairies of Greater and Lesser Celandine, and investigating the mysterious vandalism of the Strawberry Festival pavilion. So, when lovely Fanchon swept in seeking assistance, he made her sit and wait.

Fanchon's disheveled state only emphasized the sultry beauty which caused the gossip of her neighbors. Her hair was mussed, her cheeks ruddy, the shredded tips of her wings tangled on the breeze. The smell of Florence fennel filled the little office as each tear fell. And between the whimpers, Bell noted her once-euphonic tinkle had an off-note, like toy piano out-of-tune.

"Fanchon Artemisia, what kind of trouble have you gotten yourself into today?" bellowed Bell.

"Oh, Canterbury..."

"That's *Constable* Bell."

"Oh, Canterbury, I've had the most terrible fortune. I need your help!"

"Who is it this time, Fanchon? An angry gnome?"

As a flower-fairy himself, Bell was rather hurt and offended that he was regarded too foppish for a Verte. But even he could see that her wings had been manhandled. She wore one lonely little green shoe.

"For whatever personal reasons you do not care for me," Fanchon held, "I have just as much right to report a crime as any fairy.... and to be treated fairly."

Fanchon slipped off her shoe and set it gingerly in her lap. She crossed her bare ankles and began her tale.

“I am quite good at what I do, you know. We sisters don’t grow pansies. We grow flowers in the minds of men. Art, music, prose, and rhyme is Féés’ work. Fiction is my specialty.

I came to a writer’s cottage this very June. And in it I found a man of such considerable skill, I was taxed to assist him. I could only share my secrets to better content. The talent was all his. Still, he treated me with much gratitude and affection. It was difficult not to express my.... esteem.

The writer made me a seat on the finest crystal cup and silver spoon. I would sit and encourage his work deep into the night. He, in turn, would feed me sugar cubes and cool water. One evening, enamored by our success, I kissed him. I kissed him, Canterbury, *right on the mouth!*”

Bell felt his cheeks flush with envy. “And then?”

“Then the man’s wife came into the study,” Fanchon said quietly. “She called me a moral disgrace. She said I was a *vice*....”

“Cruel, yes, Fanchon, but not a crime.”

“She put some cotton wool close to my face, and I lost time. But when I woke, two pushpins speared my wings. I was tethered to a white board next to deceased *Lycaena mariposa*. It was after much sacrifice I was able to fashion my escape.... I can no longer fly....”

The constable melted a bit. “I don’t know what justice I can offer. You know the rule of law.”

“That’s all I request.”

A dark shadow descended over the station. Bell opened the doors to reveal the unfortunately familiar view of a man's loafer. The writer towered almost six feet over the ruler. He bent awkwardly to retrieve it, having recognized it as missing from his own desk drawer. A leather elbow patch brushed the station, quaking the inhabitants. And just as the writer shook soil from the ruler, a great explosion catapulted him across the wood. Befuddled by the blast, the man strode forward. He smacked comically into nothing, as a sparrow colliding with an overly-clean window. Try as he might, he could not pass into the fairy ring.

"Thank you, Canterbury." Fanchon kissed the constable on the cheek.

"But your wings, your lovely wings," Bell shook his head.

"I have no power for flight," she conceded. "But he has no book." Fanchon smiled. "The manuscript for *The Complete Book of Fairies* lies safely within the ring."