The Peony Sprite

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Abstract

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ONCE upon a summer day, a young girl sat reading in her favorite flower patch a purloined copy of Alan Ginsberg, which she pirated from her Mother's secret hiding place for it. (Her mother having borrowed it from a neighbor who had purchased it at what she considered a pornographic book shop.) She was young and beautiful. Actually, not so beautiful. That was one of her problems—not only didn't she have enough courage to read Ginsberg publicly, but she was not beautiful and inclined to be a dreamer.

What could release her? What could free the true soul within her? What could make her a real groovy kid?

In her flower patch there just happened to be a magic peony. Not really so much magic as enchanted, and when she plucked it—as she inevitably would—a small sprite would emerge. Today she plucked it.

"Hi!" said the sprite.
"Hi!" said the girl.
"Watcha readin'?" said the sprite.
"Alan Ginsberg," blushed the girl.
“Can I read it?” said the sprite.
“No!” blushed the girl more deeply.
“Aw, come on!” said the sprite. “Look I’ll trade you something. How’s about granting you something? I’m good at that!”
“All right!” said the girl. “How many wishes do I get?”
“How many is that character worth?” said the sprite as he pointed to Ginsberg.
She shrugged her shoulders and cast her eyes demurely groundward.
“Okay,” he said, “you wish away, and I’ll tell you when to stop!”
She did not hesitate. “I wish I were beautiful, and rich, and well-stacked. I wish I were talented and popular, and witty. I wish I were smart and influential and courageous. . . .”
“Wait, wait, wait!” cried the sprite. “Don’t let’s be piggy, shall we? I think I can manage the beautiful, well-stacked, and smart, but the rest of that stuff—huh uh! No dice, sweetheart! Remember I’m only as big as a peony blossom.”
“I think this poet is worth at least the witty, too,” she said determinedly. “Remember, if I read all my fairy stories right, you have to give me something or you’ll return to the peony.”
“Yeh, that’s right,” said the sprite. “Tell you what I’m going to do. I’ll give you the beautiful, witty, courageous, and popular.”
“Oh, but you’re leaving out the well-stacked and the smart!” she said. “Look, give me them too, and I’ll throw in the Pete Seeger album I have hidden in the attic.”
“Oh, forget it!” said the sprite, exasperated at last. “The peonies weren’t that bad, and you’re more trouble than you’re worth.” And with that he disappeared.
“No!” she cried, and proceeded to tear up the peony bed, but, alas, to no avail.
Now, she roams the earth, no longer young, definitely not pretty, and still a dreamer. A bitter old lady, who tears up flower beds searching for a magic peony.