

The World's a Smaller Place
#9-Genre: Fantasy, 1126
By Roda Hilenski Grubb

In one quick motion Mary jumped to grab the door, pushing Michael back onto the front porch.

"I'm so sorry!" She donned her brightest smile. "I just got home and was headed for the shower. Really, Mrs Vargas, you do need to call and let me know when you're coming over."

"Sorry, dear, I was so excited to have you meet Michael. He told me he was anxious to meet you after I told him how kind you've been." She looked deflated.

"It's ok, Mrs. Vargas, but could we do this later? Please?" Turning to Michael, she continued, "Michael, I look forward to getting to know you better." She hoped her anxiety didn't show.

Knowing she only had a few hours, she worked quickly. Grabbing anything that could clean that red reminder, she methodically used one product after the other until only a haunting memory remained.

Next was a long hot shower and donning walk-about clothes. As usual, a plan began to develop as she sang her daily shower meditation while immersed in the waterfall. Her voice grew stronger as she began to see the light.

Calling Sylvia's parents, Tomás and Linda, and offering her deepest, heartfelt regrets, she confirmed she would help in whatever way she could. Guilt flooded over her and she was acutely aware it would take maybe forever to forgive herself. She hurriedly drank a blueberry smoothie as she settled in front of her computer.

Getting her emails out of the way, she typed "Golden Sassafras" into Google. Finding the Australian tree The Golden Sassy was named after, she searched diligently for anything that could cause Sylvia to panic and be so downright terrified.

At last she thought she found it-a short sentence tucked between descriptive paragraphs about how there were more male trees than female.

Grabbing the framed flower from the wall, she turned it over looking for any hint it might offer. Taking off the back, she scanned the five inch square cardboard. Taped inside were five golden seeds, sized between watermelon and mustard seeds.

"From the ancient Gondwanaland group of trees, female. Use in emergency only. Danger: Not what one believes. Take great care of magic within. This flower: female, last from the ancients."

Mary wondered why they had been given these seeds. She still didn't know what Michael had to do with any of this.

Why would this have him scaring the pants off Sylvia? How could their flower and these seeds help in the fight against the COVID19?

It was time to call in reinforcements, a part of her life she struggled to keep hidden, a part which brought her instant joy.

Sitting on her back patio, she gazed across her fence to the woods and lake, closed her eyes and called out silently. When a gentle breeze set her melodious chimes to performing their symphony, she knew she had been heard. Despite all the craziness swirling around her she breathed deeply, relishing the sounds of normalcy surrounding her.

Mary was uneasy to open this part of her again, but she knew it was time to bring them back into her life. As she beckoned them, she knew without a doubt they would come. And, of

course, they did. She didn't know who else she could trust but Henry and Aronia always had her back, even when she ignored them.

A smile lit her face for the first time in days as she remembered these nature spirits who shared their magic with her. She had heard for years of the magic of the Rio Grande Valley but never dreamed she would be part of it.

Henry arrived first, unveiling himself, all 12 inches of tree elf, sage green tights, a tiny pair of grass-green sneakers with brown laces, beaver-brown button-down jacket with steel-blue trim and, as always, his spring-green bowler precisely matching his eyes. A perfectly round Swamp Bog Jasper, aka larsonite, adorned the middle of his forehead. Right beside him Aronia popped in, deceptively female in her matching moss-green leggings and dainty, long-sleeved tunic, her large, inquisitive eyes beaming up at Mary. A luminescent labradorite gleamed from her neck. Mary knew from their past Aronia was an adventurous, creative, brilliant spitfire of a nature sprite who shared in all Henry's adventures.

Touching her heart, then extending her arm towards the two, Mary nodded her head in greeting which told them all they needed to know, the love flowing easily between them.

"Well, Mary, what is it that brings us to thee this day?" Henry flashed his sideways grin which always melted her heart. Oh, it was so good to be with them again.

Aronia extended her leg behind and curtsied as if to royalty, sweeping her arm around to her back. Standing again she chuckled and threw Mary a kiss.

Laying out the whole story to them, Mary held nothing back.

"Well, what do you think? What could this flower and seeds mean? What was Sylvia trying to tell me? Can I trust Michael?" If anyone could give her answers, it was these two.

"Give us an hour, maybe two and we'll bring you news," Henry gave her an encouraging grin.

"While you wait, we urge you to take some time for yourself. You are in our hearts and we feel your sadness," Aronia leaped up to Mary's lap and gave her a hug. Mary had paused more than once during the story to mourn her friend.

Going back inside to her computer, her favorite source of distraction, she checked her Facebook page and noticed a number of friends suggested she join View from My Window. There she found the world unfold before her eyes. Each person posted one picture from their window and shared a comment. Life and death, birth and illness, loneliness, all shared on this site with over two million followers.

What struck her as miraculous was the idea people from around the world were supporting each other, making the world a much smaller place.

"You're not alone. We're all in this together."

"I'm so sorry about your mother's passing. Sending you blessings from"

"Happy birthday to you from"

"We're praying for your child's recovery from"

It was the most uplifting thing she had ever witnessed. The world had opened its arms and she felt globally united. Just as she began to search for Queensland, Australia she was interrupted.

"Mary!" Henry and Aronia called out in unison, faces elated. "Give us your framed flower. It is not Michael's answer, no matter what he thinks. The only thing we will tell you is . . . All is Well."

Grabbing the frame, they turned and vanished.

Confident she was no longer in danger, Mary walked across the yard to talk to Mrs. Vargas and her mysterious Michael.

Roda Hilenski Grubb's full time writing career started late in life. Having a degree in Theater/Speech Communications, she became a feature writer, winning awards along the way. Spending 10 years at a local paper, she left to write her books, *Rocksann Finds God* and *Everelle's Quest, an Isle of Foote novel* while freelancing, including writing for the McAllen Chamber of Commerce. Passionate about helping writers grow in their craft and learning the publishing business, she launched RGV Writers' Connection, a monthly opportunity to continue to study the writing world. She started *Let's Write A Story* in order to entertain readers, helping them learn more about the writing world through the different story genres and perhaps, inspire others to begin writing their own stories.