

# IN SEARCH OF PATIENCE

## JEDA PEARL LEWIS

OPEN BOOK UNBOUND WRITING

Dropping the adderstane in her lap, Sorcha wheeled over the patio to get closer. Behind her, the flat squatted at the base of the tenement. Alton's nightlight cast a soft orange glow at the edge of his blinds and the kitchen backdoor illuminated their wee garden. Dad was nursing a white rum in the front room, Irie Jamz radio turned low, mealtime disputes at rest.

Her elongated shadow lazed over the flowerbed and up the stone wall. She tied up her locs, angled herself to get more light from the kitchen and raised the flat adderstane back to her left eye.

The sight-hole was small, but it was the only adderstane she'd brought out and it was still summer, so the warm night was open and waiting.

An orchestra of wood sorrels crowded the elder tree's base, white trumpet flowers heralding their takeover. Hairy herb bennets fought back with spiky burrs on the end of tall, branching stems. Between them, common butterworts stood their ground. The crafty carnivores looked the height of innocence – green sunbeams below a single-stem – but the sticky leaves curled at the edges, dissolving minerals from snared insects, while the purple bell surveyed above like a queen.

One butterwort's spray of leaves was completely free of bugs. That was suspicious.

'I'll wait aw night if I have tae,' she said.

With a sigh, the air beside that butterwort solidified into a grouchy faery. It was cornflower blue with webbed fingers and toes, more frog-like than last time, and thoroughly unimpressed that its cotton-tuft coat was caught on a herb bennet burr.

'Who exactly have you set this trap fir?' it said.

Hacksaw giggles, metal on metal, tumbled from above. Sorcha moved the adderstane a few centimetres and there were the weans, turquoise and colbalt, flinging and peeling themselves on and off the spiky burrs.

‘You’re in a bit of a fankle,’ said Sorcha.

‘Aye, and I must mak haste,’ said the faery.

‘I’ll gladly dae you a kind turn, if you’ll return the favour.’

Its face moved through various states of vexation, settling on miffed.

‘Och, come away in,’ it said, pinching its thumb and forefinger to suck Sorcha through the adderstane’s hole. She heard the seeing stone hit the paving slabs as she and her wheelchair flew through the gateway.

She landed soft enough, if a little queasy, shrunk to the height of about six inches.

‘I’ll free you first then see to the weans.’

‘Mynd, this coat took all summer to grow.’

‘Aye, I’ll tak tent. Do we have a deal?’

‘Yes, Miss Sorcha All-Seeing, I will grant one request.’

Still, the faery gurned condescension as it waited to be released. The burrs looked much more vicious up close – a sphere covered in spikes with hooks at the end, as big as her head.

‘It’s no a trap,’ she said. ‘I kent you fair fowk liked the peerie bugs, so I tried tae grow more butterwort fir you.’

‘Hmm,’ it said, cutting its eyes at her.

‘Right, that’s you. I’m afraid I dinnae ken your name.’

‘And we’ll keep it that way, missy. I’m no about tae be called up whenever the mood strikes.’

They both looked up at the weans springing about the top stems. The faery glanced at Sorcha’s wheelchair and raised a hairless eyebrow.

Ignoring the look, she wheeled over the caked-dry ground to the closest stem. It was fuzzy but prickly and, although she’d been shrunk, she retained her full-size strength, so could pull the towering stems down bit by bit.

The faery nodded and moved off to stuff more bugs in its basket.

‘You can get doun frae there your own selves or I’ll let this go and the Gods will pick where you land,’ Sorcha said to the weans.

They signalled her to wait and clambered down, laughing, slapping, and shoving one another. Two leapt onto her, fighting for a spot, so she placed one wean firmly on each knee, patting their heads to calm them.

She manoeuvred towards the faery.

‘I want an audience with Mother Elder.’

‘Whit? Never in a midsummer night!’

‘Are you no bound by the code.’

‘Shame on you fir asking such a price.’

It plucked and chewed a sorrel leaf, then spat on the ground. A chamber opened up and it hustled the weans through. They veered to the left and out of sight.

Sorcha wheeled across onto a polished lapis lazuli stoneway. Green branches bowed above the deep blue path, smothering one another. It was hot and clammy. The air was thick with the scent of aniseed. She never did like liquorice.

String-of-tears spurted out in minty froths, crying down tree trunks, their buds bursting open to release creamy tufts.

Not a single leaf or earthcrumb fell on this pristine path. It was smooth like polished marble, not reflective but a warm, silty blue. Overgrown ferns curled away at the path edge, as did monstera, calatheas, moss hills, ivy – no plant wanted to touch it. No life crawled across it. It was a divine surface to wheel over.

Amid rustling leaves and gentle hoots was a heavier, raspier sound. They'd meet soon. She imagined them growing – the rods in her back – titanium elongating like vines, splitting and unravelling into a fine, strong web.

‘You demanded an audience with me?’ purred a voice behind her.

‘Thank you, Divine Mother Elder, your presence is known.’ She spun herself around. Mother Elder’s base of pulsating tree roots writhed and crawled as if seeking soil. They twisted up and together into thick woven trunks. Her arms were many branches, budding with fresh growth, and her face was gnarled and magnificent.

‘I can bestow *orchid-tongue of curious* for your son.’

‘No. And, dinnae even dare try tae switch him, neither. Divine Mother Elder.’

Tiny petals rained down in agreement.

‘*Oak-root of patience*, then. For you.’

Sorcha nodded.

‘You won’t relent *courage maternal*, so... *River of grief* will set the bargain.’ She offered a branch, with plump clusters of elderberries, dripping ruby cordial to bind the deal.

‘I be glad to be rid of it when the time comes,’ said Sorcha, extending her palm to catch the drip.

She was immediately spat out and back home. It was now morning, and she was exhausted.

She wheeled into the house, stopping to pick up the adderstane. It was chipped.

\*

Staring down the packed fridge, she stifled a sigh, anticipating another battleground.

‘I got him off to school,’ said Dad, hovering behind her. ‘Didn’t want to wake you.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Forget the jerk chicken – leave it till tomorrow. Let’s eat Alton stylee tonight.’

‘Serious?’

‘Yeah man. Empty out the crunch cupboard.’

Her throat was caught – hooked to her stomach. Out of the corner cupboard came bran and cream crackers, pretzels, granola, kernels for popcorn, cashew nuts, almonds, bread sticks, salt and vinegar crisps, carrots, sugar snap peas.

‘Mynd when you found Alton hiding in here,’ she said.

‘When him five-year-old? Scrunched-up, belly-full and sleeping!’ He laughed, long and hard. ‘You spoil him.’

‘I know Dad.’

‘But see now, it not a go-bad kinda spoiling. Your Uncle Walter was like Alton, same way.

Only pan-bottom burnt rice, only double-fried fish. Mama spoil him, same as you. Though, Starbeam—’

She’d not heard her pet name for some time.

‘—it really a kindness. She overstand his sensitivities. Like you and Alton, eh?’ He clapped her shoulder.

She turned and wrapped her arms around his waist, hugging him tight, her head on his belly.

‘You break my back, gal, if a minute longer. Now pass the flour and salt. I go make the thinniest, crispiest fried dumpling him ever had.’

*Jeda Pearl is a Scottish-Jamaican writer and poet. She’s been published/commissioned by Black Lives Matter Mural Trail, New Writing Scotland, Tapsalteerie, Shoreline of Infinity, Rhubaba, Collective, the British Council, StAnza and Peepal Tree Press.*

*@JedaPearl*

*jedapearl.com*