

WALKING STICK

Once upon a time lived a green and gold walking stick who was so beautiful that no one ever wanted to use it. "Take the beautiful green and gold walking stick dear," said Ultradia to her husband Circadia. "No, no, no," he insisted, "I'll use the red, yellow and blue one instead. You know the green and gold one is much too precious to use for walking."

The green and gold walking stick was sick with depression. It had lost faith in its ability to remember how to be a walking stick. "What am I to do," it would moan, "I am much to useful to just sit here in the closet just wasting away my days." But on the days that Circadia would come to choose a walking stick, the green and gold stick would cringe and make itself small and unnoticed to avoid being chosen for fear of making a mistake in walk sticking.

It couldn't remember walking stick rules like which of its ends was top and which was bottom, or whether to fall down or remain upright if it were to slip out of Circadia's hand. Poor green and gold walking stick, such anxiety, such a problem. All day and night it would cry that it was never of any use to anyone, yet when it came time to be chosen it would become silent and shrunken.

Then one night as everyone was sleeping, it had the most curious dream. In the dream a voice said, "gold point down, green ball up. You are to jump out through the closet door and poke your master and force him to follow you to the old well at the edge of the town. Hurry now, do it, do it."

Sure enough the green and gold walking stick jumped out of the closet and woke and lead the man to the old well. But because the stick was so out of practice for doing anything useful, actually for doing anything at all, it forgot, and it put its bottom side up and the green ball end down. It was very painful to walk-stick this way, but the green and gold walking stick was so excited at doing something at long last, it didn't know the difference.

By the time they reached the old well at the edge of town, the green ball was pretty beaten up but Circadia was mostly asleep and didn't even notice he was not still in bed fast asleep or that the green and gold stick was upside down. At the well the same voice of the dream demanded that Circadia walk three times to the east and three times to the

west and to turn around and around holding the walking stick pointing straight up to the sky.

Finally, Circadia was so dizzy and confused that he fell down into the well down, down to the water where he awoke with a start and a sputter. "Hey..., help, help, help...", he cried but to no end, for at that time of the night everyone was asleep.

The green and gold walking stick was very confused. It didn't know whether to fall to the ground and remain standing up or to fall flat on its side. It could not remember the rules. So it stayed just as it was in confusion, six feet up, pointing straight to the sky and stars above.

The well water was cold, very cold, but not very deep. And the well was very narrow. Circadia stayed awake most of the night from the cold and the shock of his fall. He yelled and called but finally lost his voice. At long last he fell asleep slumped forward against the sides of the well, his face just inches above the water. He slept all day long but awake again at night, calling for help but to no avail. Circadia could not tell the brightness of day from the dark of night because of the narrowness and depth of the well. Ultradia was beside herself. She could not find her husband anywhere. She looked everywhere. For hours on end she searched through the town forgetting to eat or even sleep in her desperation. On and on she ran through the town, upsetting everything and anyone in her way. "I know he is here and in deep trouble," she repeated to anyone who was near.

Finally, of course, someone sighted the green and gold walking stick floating above the old well. The beauty of the stick was so great, however, that the young girl who found it did not note the strangeness of the circumstances. She just jumped up, pulled the stick down and began walking like a fancy businessman from the city.

When she got to the town, people gathered around amused at her silly walk and so amazed at the beauty of the green and gold stick that they didn't think to ask her where she found it. She was having so much fun and enjoyed being at the center of everyone's attention, that she kept performing and the crowd got bigger and bigger. She didn't stop for lunch or dinner and when night came she kept right on going stronger than ever. No one wanted or even thought about eating or sleeping. Nothing so exciting had ever happened before. Soon everyone from miles around had gathered to share in the fun.

Everyone, that is, but Ultradia who had become lost inside herself and was blinded to everything but the sight of her poor lost Circadia. On, on, on it went, nothing changing. The huge crowd pushing to keep up with the lucky girl with the beautiful green and gold walking stick wandered up and down the streets and around the town. Ultradia set in her path pushing and looking in vain for Circadia.

Finally at dawn on the second day, the crowd and Ultradia met on the edge of town. Through the crowd she pushed and pulled, forcing her way to the center and the girl with the stick. "THAT is my husband's stick," she shrieked.

"NO, it's mine," cried the girl. She so loved being the center of attention she would not give up the stick for anything. She broke into her fastest and fanciest run and fled from the crazed Ultradia.

"Come back, give me that stick," Ultradia screamed as she followed. Away they went: stick, girl, crowd and the poor Ultradia. Over walls and through gardens, up and down hills, they uprooted trees and broke down fences. Ultradia shoved and raced and made her way closer and closer to the clowning girl with her husband's stick.

Just as they reached the old well at the edge of the town, Ultradia made a desperate grab for the stick but the girl fell, fancy but hard, against the side of the old well. The beautiful but frightened green and gold walking stick was hurled far up into the air. The crowd roared with excitement.

High above the well, still confused about whether to fall standing up or on its side, the poor walking stick just froze suspended in mid-flight.

Circadia, his voice weak from calling through the night, had just fallen asleep before the crowd arrived. The thunder of the thud of footsteps woke him up and he yelled and cried but the noise of the roar buried his words. But when the stick just stayed as if planted in the very air itself, the crowd went dumb and in the sudden silence, like the baa, baa, baa of the sheep in a far-off meadow, Circadia's muffled voice remained.

The frozen moment lasted just that long and so did Circadia's chance of being heard, for Ultradia jumped and lunged for the gold and green stick but missed and landed upside down, suspended, caught by her foot in a crack in the stone wall above the well. The people looked down and saw her foot and leg and bottom, but could not see poor Circadia because her dress blocked their view of him. Ultradia was pulled from the well, dazed

but not too badly hurt and much the worse for wear.

Nearly frozen and exhausted, Circadia could not be heard from the bottom of the well below. The stick in its greatest flash of knowledge suddenly remembered the rules of falling and lost its fear. It let go and fell straight down into the well where it struck and poked Circadia with its golden pointed end.

"Yeouch," he cried with great pain and power. So loud was his retort that when his sound finally echoed up the well, the crowd reacted, stunned with fear. He was discovered at last.

When he finally caught up with himself, when he began to fall to sleep in the evening and wake up at dawn, and when Ultradia recovered and ate and slept as before, they noticed that the green and gold walking stick was not so beautiful as it was before. It was scuffed and scratched, and its green ball top was chewed to rough. But its gold still shined, and beauty still shone enough for the man to want to use it, which he did every time he went for a walk around the town.