

Rays From The Rose Cross Magazine

The Extraordinary Mushroom by Dagmar Frahme

The mushroom was very small, very round and very purple. Jeremy reached out a cautious finger to touch it, and as he did so, the mushroom jumped away. Jeremy stepped back in disbelief, watched the mushroom intently for a moment, and reached out to touch it once more. Again the mushroom jumped away.

Jeremy got down on his hands and knees, crawled around the mushroom, inspecting it from all sides and scraped some of the dirt away from its stem.

"Stop that!" ordered a small high and quite angry little voice, startling Jeremy so much that he fell over.

"Who said that?" he demanded, recovering his balance and looking all around but seeing no one.

"I said that," said the voice, "and I'll thank you not to dig me up."

Jeremy stared at the mushroom. The voice actually seemed to be coming from *it* — but that was impossible. Or was it?

"Did — did you just talk?" he said to the mushroom.

"Yes, I just talked," it answered, sharply. "I wasn't *singing*."

"But you're a mushroom," protested Jeremy.

"Certainly I'm a mushroom. What do I look like, a snapdragons Whatever else could be said for it, it was clear that the mushroom was not in a pleasant mood.

Jeremy thought of several things to say, but none of them seemed appropriate. He seemed only to be making the mushroom angry, and something told him that this was not a good idea. Finally he said softly, "I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. I didn't mean to, but I didn't know mushrooms could talk and I'm afraid you startled me."

"Oh, you human beings are all alike," said the mushroom disgustedly. "You think you're the only ones

who can talk. Why shouldn't mushrooms talk, too — or *any* plants, for that matter?"

"But I never heard plants talk," protested Jeremy again.

"That's because you never listened." The mushroom still sounded disgusted. "So many of you human beings, when you *do* come to the woods, go tramping through making lots of noise, stepping on plants, and not paying any attention to us except maybe to cut us or pick us or even tear us apart. I wish I had a nickel for every boy who ever yelled, 'Look at the mushrooms!', and then kicked one of my friends over to see what he looked like underneath."

Jeremy had done just that many times, and now he was very embarrassed. He looked down at his shoes and said, "That's why you jumped away when I tried to touch you."

"Of course," said the mushroom. "I'm lucky, I can jump away. Most of my friends can't."

"How come you can jump?" asked Jeremy.

"Because I'm an extraordinary mushroom," it answered simply, and refused to say any more about *that*.

Jeremy and the mushroom looked at each other for a long time, the mushroom sizing Jeremy up, and Jeremy, at the same time, longing to ask many more questions but still feeling very embarrassed. At last the mushroom said, "Since you can hear me, you must be a rather unusual human being. Maybe you can hear other plants, too. Shall we visit some of my friends and see if then can teach you anything?"

"Oh, yes," said Jeremy gratefully. "Thank you very much. I'd like that."

"Come along, then," said the mushroom, and began to jump, inch by inch, deeper into the woods. Jeremy had to walk as slowly as he could to keep from getting ahead of the mushroom, but he was still busy looking and listening, and several times he was positive that he heard whispering around him. Once a voice distinctly said, "There's the boy who pulled off my cones last year before they were ready to fall, and my branches hurt for weeks after that." Jeremy looked up and found himself directly beneath a tall pine tree from which he certainly had pulled quite a few cones last year. His cheeks turned very pink as he remembered that all he had done with the cones after pulling them off was to throw them on the ground.

Jeremy heard other voices all around him, too, whispering things like, "Boys!" and "Sometimes I wish we could lock up the woods and keep people out," and "How come he's bringing that human being in here?" He was beginning to feel mighty uncomfortable by the time the mushroom stopped in the place where Jeremy had often picked raspberries.

"Hi," said the mushroom to the first raspberry bush. "I brought a friend to see you. "

"Why?" asked the bush. "These kids manage to get in here very well by themselves."

"This one's different," said the mushroom. "He can hear you. Maybe you could set him straight on a few things."

The bush looked at Jeremy with new interest. "Can you really understand what I'm saying?" it asked.

"Yes, Sir." Jeremy couldn't have told you why he had said "Sir" to a bush, but for some reason he suddenly felt the way he did when his father talked to him sternly and "Sir" just seemed to be the right thing to say.

"Then listen carefully," said the bush, sounding more like his father every minute. "We are glad for you and

your friends to come pick our berries so you can remember a few things. First of all, our berries are very good when they are ripe, but just wasted if you pick them before that. Besides, it hurts when people yank them off too early. Also, we wish that you people would be more careful. You always reach for the biggest and the fattest berries, and don't seem to care how many others you squash, or how many branches you break or step on, to get them. Our smaller berries are just as juicy as our big ones, and sometimes they taste even better. There is a right way and a wrong way to pick berries, just as there is a right way and a wrong way to do everything else, and we hope you will remember that, and teach your friends."

"I will, I sure will," said Jeremy, remembering how often he had pulled unripe berries from bushes, or gone out of his way to get the biggest, fattest ones when others were nearer. "From now on I'll see to it that anyone I pick berries with does it the right way."

"Let's go on," said the mushroom. "I think by now most of my friends know you are here."

Remembering all the whispers he had heard in the woods, Jeremy was sure of that.

The mushroom jumped on until they came to a little clump of violets growing at the foot of a maple tree that seemed to be bending protectively over them. When the violets saw Jeremy they all shuddered and turned their faces away.

"Don't be afraid, " said the mushroom. "He won't hurt you."

"He already hurt our sister," said one of the violets, sniffing just a little, and Jeremy turned red with shame as he remembered what had happened last week when he was digging up some violets for his science project. He dug up one little plant, roots and all, and was about to transplant it into the flower pot he had brought along when he saw a much bigger plant, with many blossoms, growing nearby.

"Aw, this is no good," he had said to himself, tossing the little plant aside, and he dug out the big one and transplanted it, leaving the little plant lying upside down, its roots drying up in the hot sun.

"I'm sorry about what I did to your sister," Jeremy told the violets. I didn't know any better then, but I certainly won't do it again."

The violet looked at Jeremy dubiously, and then at the mushroom.

"He means it," said the mushroom. "You can trust him now. And it won't hurt to tell him how we feel about being transplanted."

"Well —" began the violet, still frightened, we're very happy here in the woods. We have just the right things to help us grow. We have the sun and the rain and the good earth, and Nature Spirits who take care of us, and we'd really rather live here all the rest of our lives. But, if there are people who really love us, and will take care of us properly, and want to dig us up and take us to their homes or gardens, we don't mind, as long as they really *do* take care of us. And we don't mind if boys and girls take us to school for their science projects, because it's very important that they learn about us. But we do mind very much if we are just dug up and destroyed or left to die. How would you like it if some big giant came to your city and overturned all the houses and took away your food and water and just left *you* to die?", the violet finished in a surprisingly firm tone of voice.

Jeremy gulped. "We — we wouldn't like it at all," he admitted, "and I promise you I'll tell all the people I

know about the right way and the wrong way of taking plants from the woods."

"I'm sure he will," the mushroom reassured the violets, who felt just a little better and smiled faintly at Jeremy as the mushroom led him away.

They came, after a little while, to the friendly crabapple tree that Jeremy and his friends found so easy to climb because its branches grew close to the ground.

"I know this young man," the tree said to the mushroom as they approached, "and I know his friends, too. Did you bring him here so he could show you how well he climbs trees?"

"No," said the mushroom. "I brought him here so you could talk to him. He will understand you today."

"Oh?" The tree looked at Jeremy in surprise. "Well, young man, have you any idea what I want to talk to you about?"

"I guess you don't want us to climb you any more," answered Jeremy sadly.

"No, no, that's not it," said the tree. "We trees don't mind boys and girls climbing us — as long as we have

grown big and strong enough to stand up under your weight. In fact, we rather enjoy it. But what we do mind most definitely is to have our twigs and bark torn off and peeled off once you're up in our branches and find yourselves with nothing better to do. Did you ever think that that might not be good for us?"

Jeremy gulped again. "Well—uh—no I'm afraid I never did. But I guess it's sort of like pulling the skin off ourselves, isn't it?"

"Of course," answered the tree. "Now you come back and climb me whenever you want — and bring your friends, too —" it added, "but remember what I told you and see that they do, too."

"I will, " said Jeremy, "and thank you. You won't ever have to worry about having your bark pulled off again, I promise."

"Good," said the tree, and Jeremy and the mushroom went on their way once more.

Presently they came to the biggest tree in the woods, the old oak who had lived for hundreds of years and had seen the Indians and the pioneers come and go. Its branches were heavy and gnarled, and for some reason

Jeremy and his friends had always looked at it with a little bit of awe.

"Hello, my friend," the oak said to the mushroom.
"Are you showing Jeremy around our woods?"

"In a way," answered the mushroom, while Jeremy wondered how on earth the oak knew his name.

"Jeremy can talk to us today-more important, he can *listen* — and I thought he might learn something from you. "

"Well, I'll try to teach him what I can," boomed the tree.

"Jeremy, I have lived for a long time, and have seen many things that your history books tell about, and some things they don't even mention. We've had fires in our woods, and we've had people come in and destroy some of us, and we've had windstorms that did a lot of damage. But the most useless destruction is the kind that is all over my trunk. Look at it, and tell me what you see."

Jeremy looked, and saw what he had often looked at before without seeing. The trunk of the old tree was covered with carved initials, dates, hearts and arrows and even a few words. Some had been there for years,

and the latest, initials and a date, had been carved by Jeremy's brother only a few weeks before.

"Well, Jeremy?" prompted the tree.

"I see lots of carving," whispered Jeremy, squirming. It was silly, he told himself, but he was just a little bit afraid of that tree.

"Do you think I started out this way?" boomed the tree again.

"No," whispered Jeremy.

"No," repeated the tree. "People did that to me. People with pocket knives. It looks bad, and it feels bad. You might not believe this, but whenever someone digs a knife into me it hurts all over again. All the oak trees in this wood are my children and grand-children and great-grand- children. Some of them are marked up, too, but maybe I can spare the younger ones all this pain and unsightliness. Do you think you could do us a favor, Jeremy, and ask the people not to do this to us? We like to have them visit our woods, and we like it when they relax in the shade of our branches or have picnics at our feet, but every time we see one coming along we can't help wondering if he has a knife tucked away in his back pocket."

Jeremy was so astonished at the idea of the tree asking him a favor — it looked quite capable of snatching him up in its branches and shaking him hard — that he said nothing for a minute. Then he looked at the tree again, and suddenly a wonderful feeling came over him. That tree wanted to be his friend — all the plants in the woods wanted to be friends — if only Jeremy would cooperate and be friendly too.

"You bet I'll ask the people not to cut you up any more," he said enthusiastically. "All the kids, and some grownups I know, too, need lots of educating about the woods, and I'm going to see that they get it!"

"I'm glad, Jeremy," said the tree in a deep, quiet voice. "And come back to see me soon. This is the coolest spot around in summer, you know."

Jeremy waved to the tree, and followed the mushroom as it started to lead the way out of the woods. It was getting dark, and Jeremy would have lost his way without the mushroom's guidance.

That evening, Jeremy's family was very surprised as he began to lecture them about proper behavior in the woods.

"I'm very happy to hear you say all these things," his father said at last, "but I wonder how you came to such conclusions. I can hardly believe that you thought them out yourself."

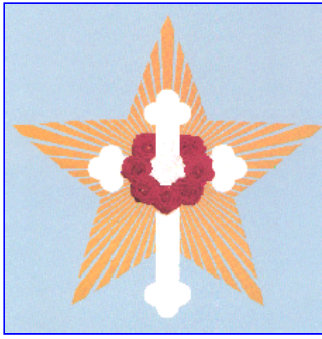
Jeremy only smiled. They probably wouldn't believe him if he did tell them about the extraordinary mushroom, and someone was bound to say, "Aw, come on, you know trees can't talk. "He'd just make sure everyone he knew treated his friends in the woods the right way. The rest would be his secret.

Jeremy never saw the extraordinary mushroom again, but often after that, as he walked in the woods, he heard whispers all around him. "There's Jeremy," they said. "He's our friend."

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