

# IT

By Michele Jobst

It had no name. Everyone just called it, “It”. It didn’t mind. It didn’t mind anything, except the flowers. Well, mostly just dandelions. The field round back is nothing but dandelions in the Spring. Spring is It’s favorite season. Nobody understands why It likes them ole weeds so much, but then again nobody understands It at all.

It would go out in the morning and pick the dandelions closest to the house. We’d call It in for lunch, and It’d come in the house with exactly thirty-two dandelions. It wasn’t a picky eater but boy It was a slow eater. Takes It twice as long as everyone else to finish one helping of food. Ma started given It a bigger helping cause there was never anything left after everyone else was done. Ma used to say that Jim and Jake alone could eat a bull. Once I asked her how much I could eat and she said considering my age, she reckoned I could manage a small heifer. Then Susie asked how much It could eat and Ma said that with It’s pace of eating, It could probably manage our whole herd.

It wasn’t big as far as size goes, but neither was It small. It was right in the middle, a happy medium, as Ma’s always sayin’. There wasn’t anything too special about It. Not that It was handsome at all, but It wasn’t half as ugly as the tanner in Bauer. Once we was in Bauer, trading some of our livestock and I saw him. That tanner was prob’ly the ugliest man I ever did see. He had a big honker in the middle of his face and one eye was higher than the other. His hair was a dry blonde and it was swept o’er the face to make the eyes look evener. Couldn’t fool me, though. He was a short, dirty man whose smile looked more like a bear growl than a smile. Yup, compared to him, It might even be called good lookin’.

Nothing was special about It, except the dandelions. After lunch, everyday during the spring, he’d walk out to the far end o’ the dandelion field. All alone out there, It would come back at dusk with exactly eighteen dandelions, nine in each hand.

It never cried. It never laughed. It never sighed. It never spoke. It hardly made a sound. The clump, clump of It’s shoes on the floor was the only noise It made. Ma said that’s a blessing cause all the rest of us make enough noise to drive her crazy. Whether it’s the big boy’s rough play in the house, Susie whining about something, Pa yellin’ at

the boys to take it outside, Ma's dinner sizzlin' on the stove, or the animals' clamor outside. It never made a sound. Just clump, clump over to the cupboard. Clump, clump over to the water pump. Clump, clump over to the window. Clump, clump, caring for the dandelions. Clump, clump.

Once the dandelion season was over, It always got real sad. It would sit by the fire and do nothing. Then one winter, Susie was readin' out of the Bible picture book that Ma always helped us to learn our letters in. On one page there's a picture of this lion and lamb sitting together in a field of dandelions. Well once It saw that picture, that book never left It's hands. From then on every morning, It would turn each page of that ole picture book until he reached the page with the dandelions on it. Then It'd just stare at the page for the rest of the day. Studying each flower, over and over again. Every day all we'd hear was the rustling of page, after page, after page. Once Jake got so fed up with the sound, that he tried to help It by turnin' to the right page but It wouldn't let him touch that book. With hunched shoulders, It would protectively watch if anyone drew near enough to touch the book. We just couldn't make It see how much help we could be. So eventually we stopped tryin'. It had a way of doin' things, and we had our way of doin' things. It didn't seem to mind doin' everything different from everyone else. It was happy as long as there were dandelions.

Towards the end of the growin' season, Ma always dried the flowers from her garden in Jeremiah's old stall. Jeremiah was our old mule. Darn'd if he wasn't the world's most stubborn ole mule. After a while, we just stopped trying to make him do any hard work. He was the gentlest animal, just so darn stubborn. Once things came down to actually workin' he just wouldn't have anything to do with them. The only reason we had to keep him was cause Susie had to go and take a likin' to him. She had a soft spot for that useless animal. I don't know, maybe it was a good thing, cause then I didn't have to take care of ole Jeremiah anymore. Susie did it. She was the one to feed him and brush him everyday. Right to the end of that stubborn mule's life. Susie cried for almost three weeks after her pet died. And everyday for those three weeks she'd put flowers into his stall. That's when Ma got the idea to dry her flowers there instead of up in the attic.

I'll never forget the Spring day that we had the Wilsons over. That was the same day that It discovered Ma's dried flowers in the barn. We hardly ever had guests over to the house. So when the Wilsons moved into the Myers' old house, just short of five miles down the road, Ma insisted on invite 'em all over for dinner. As it turned out, there were only four people in the Wilson party. They had a girl about my age, named Lisa, and a boy, named Tom, about Jim and Jake's. It had gone out in the mornin' like always, which Ma said was just as well, so he wouldn't be underfoot. Everyone was rushin' hither and thither to get ready for the guests to arrive. Then when they finally arrived, the meetin' and greetin' of everyone to everyone else started. We never noticed that It wasn't there til after supper was finished. Then Mrs. Wilson asked why we had set an extra plate. That's when all at once, we all realized It had never come in for supper. It always stayed close to the house in the morning, so when we couldn't see It out in the field, Ma started to panic. She starts a hollarin' and makin' a fuss. Pa finally got her calmed down by tellin' her that him and the boys was gonna find It and that It couldn't be that far away. So all us men headed out to the barn to gather our search party supplies, when low and behold we find It all tangled in the wires of Ma's dried flowers. We never will know how It managed, but the only flowers still hangin' on the wall was a clump of thirty-two dandelions. All the other flowers were torn apart, trampled on, and scattered all over the place. In the middle of all that mess, sat It tangled like no tomorrow in about three feet of wire. The wire had gotten so jumbled with It's limbs that movement was practically impossible. It just smiled up at us and tried to point to the dandelions. Pa sent Jim to tell Ma, which of course means all the women folk comes a runnin' to the barn to see for themselves. At that point Ma didn't know whether to cry at the state of her flowers or of the state of It. Eventually Pa and Mr. Wilson was able to unscramble It. While Mrs. Wilson helped clean up the flowers, Ma took It into the house scoldin' and a bossin' all the while. Yep, that was one memorable day for us, prob'ly for the Wilsons too. Maybe things like this is why we never have people over. Never the less, Ma started drying out dandelions for It, so that no more disasters would happen again.

Every year that goes by brought changes on us. We all adapted to the changes. Like when Jim got hitched and moved up by Lomask, which was slightly bigger than Bauer. Or when Jake went off to the University. But It never changed. Same thing year

after year. In the Spring, It picked dandelions. In the Summer, It picked dandelions 'til there weren't none left. In the Fall, It looked at that ole picture book. In the Winter, It would arrange and rearrange Ma's dried dandelions til the poor flowers was just a pile of dust. Then Spring would come again and It would be out there every mornin', rain or shine, bring in thirty-two, then back out in the afternoon and bring back eighteen. Day after day, season after season, year after year. This bothered me for a while, 'til my second year of college, which was also the year of Pa's accident.

The year of his accident was a terrible experience for everyone except for It. We were just never able to get It to realize what Pa's death meant. When we tried to explain, It would just look at us and nod, then head out to the dandelion field. In his will, made up with Judge Hackett, Pa stated that he wised to be buried in the southwest corner of the dandelion field. When the day of Pa's funeral came, everyone was somber and gloomy, with no more tears to give up in his memory. But It just went out like normal, brought back thirty-two dandelions, and went back out. We had to wait 'til dusk to bury Pa cause It didn't come back 'til then and Ma insisted on everyone being present. Once It was back, we all filed out to the field where the grave diggers had been before us. The preacher said his prayers and then we lowered the casket into the hole. As we were grabbin' shovels to fill up the hole, It climbs on in. We all watched in silence, as It spreads the thirty-two dandelions limp from being picked that morning and the eighteen picked in the afternoon in two straight rows all down the casket. Then slowly, quietly, It climbs out of the hole and heads for the house. We just stare in disbelief at the dandelions covering the casket. I think it was Susie who was finally able to put everyone's thoughts into words, "Fifty, that's how old Pa was before...I don't understand... how did It know?" Watching It stoop down to pick a dandelion on the way into the house, we realized Pa's death would leave a hole not only in our lives but in It's. To tell the truth, I was never able to look at those little yellow flowers, that many simply call a weed, in the same way again.

