

GLOXINIA

Written by Sarah Levine Simon

Gloxinia awakened to loud scraping and tearing and jumped out of her bed. Uncle Henry sat high on a ladder outside her bedroom door. He was holding a large roll of wallpaper and a very wide brush. The old ivy wallpaper was already packed in plastic garbage bags like crumpled old clothes. A rusty stain on the bare wall reminded Gloxinia of her doggy self.

“The new wallpaper has come, Gloxinia.” said Uncle Henry. “We’re going to have new flowers all over the hall.” He unrolled enough to cover a panel of wall.

Gloxinia sniffed the paper and wagged her bushy tail. “Roses! Can I help?”

“Watch out, Gloxinia, you’ll knock over my glue!” Uncle Henry screamed but it was too late. Gloxinia’s tail slapped the metal bucket and sent glue flowing like a melted slinky down the wooden stairs in wavy glops. Glop over glop and glop over glop.

“Oh dear!” Gloxinia despaired her voice trailing off as she watched the icky, sticky glued widen toward the bottom like a river anxious to see an ocean. “I’ll help you, clean the mess, Uncle Henry. I’m so, so sorry”

“Please, Gloxinia! No! I don’t need any help.” he wailed scrambling down the ladder and down the stairs to clean up the glue. “Please, Gloxinia. Just go before you step in it and make it worse!”

Feelings all too often can’t produce the right words, thought Gloxinia. Uncle Henry didn’t mean to talk to me that way.

[picture Gloxinia’s tail dragging in the glue]

In the kitchen, Aunt Sylvia and Aunt Patsy worked at the table where they pulled and rolled shiny strudel dough on a white linen cloth. Gloxinia loved strudel. “Oh could I help?” she asked and nudged the end of the table cloth. Her wagging tail caused the flour-dust to swirl in the air and the ball of dough to land in Aunt Sylvia’s lap.

“No, not today, Gloxinia.” “Aunt Sylvia coughed and smacked the round dough back onto the center of the table. “We have to work fast or the dough will become too dry to pull.”

Great bowls of sliced apples and chopped nuts sat on the counter nearby. Gloxinia sniffed cinnamon, cardamom and a pinch of clove. Hmmm she sniffed deeply as she inched close to the counter.

“Your breakfast is in your bowl on the back porch, Gloxinia. Go and eat!” The two aunts bellowed in turn. “But don’t eat too fast or you’ll get a belly ache.”

Gloxinia ignored her bowl. She wasn’t fond of cereal. She wanted to help pull the strudel dough and fill it with the fragrant apples instead.

“What is wrong with you, Gloxinia? If you’re good we’ll have Strudel after supper tonight.” Aunt Sylvia was still wearing her turquoise bathrobe and her hair was in plump curlers that reminded Gloxinia of giant macaronis.

Aunt Patsy was already dressed for the day in her plaid gardening pants and a big white apron. “My Gloxinia, the sun’s been up for three hours now.””

“But why can’t I help make the strudel?”

“Have your breakfast. That will be the biggest help of all.” said Aunt Patsy as she opened the screen door for Gloxinia who managed to knock

over the garbage on the way out. It was filled with the curly green apple peels and Gloxinia couldn't help tasting a few.

"Gloxinia!" Aunt Patsy shot a stern glance at her.

"I'll help clean it up." wailed Gloxinia.

"Please, Gloxinia! Just go out!" demanded both aunts.

Feelings all too often don't produce the right words, thought Gloxinia as she gulped down her breakfast. Aunt Patsy and Aunt Sylvia did not mean to talk to me that way.

Gloxinia sniffed the morning air and lumbered over to the wicket gate. Overnight sprays of roses had climbed to the top of the trellis and yesterday's buds were yawning into blossoms.

"What a lovely day for a walk. I know, I'll go fetch the morning paper. That will be a great help." With that good thought, Gloxinia nudged the gate. It creaked on its rusty hinges and opened into the long alley paved in cracked asphalt.

The morning sun warmed Gloxinia's back as she meandered along. The dry cleaner and the shoemaker were opening the gates to their shops. The back door of Krick Krack, the restaurant, was open and Maurice himself was busily mixing secret pepper spices for his famous stew. Gloxinia sniffed deeply of the onions and celery browning with meat in a large skillet. She scratched at the screen door.

"Could I help you stir, Maurice?"

"Chere chien, Gloxinia, alas, no! Dogs are not allowed into restaurants. I will lose my license if I let you stir." Maurice adjusted the flame under the skillet, picked up a large mixing bowl and brought it to the doorway. "But you could help me with some leftovers. I saved you some

potatoes, stew-meat and a soup knuckle. I thought you would enjoy them for your breakfast with rice and peas.”

“Well if there’s no one to help this morning, then I might as well help myself.” Gloxinia wagged her tail as she gnawed the soup knuckle down to a minuscule little lump.

“Thank you, Maurice.” she wagged. “That was delicious.”

“Come again, Gloxinia.” Chimed Maurice as Gloxinia went on her way.

Gloxinia felt thirsty after eating such a large breakfast. At the rear of Jane’s grocery store she noticed a puddle formed by a drippy faucet and drank.

Grocer Jane stood behind her large glass case. She was slicing salami for a customer who complained loudly. “Please, no end today!” And caused the grocer Jane to open up a new salami.

Gloxinia thought about how a day without end would be a strange day indeed, “ Could I help you?” she asked thinking how tired Grocer Jane would be on a day that refused to end.

But the grocer Jane thought Gloxinia looked hungry. “Would you like some salami ends, Gloxinia?”

Gloxinia wagged her tail.

“Customers are always so finicky.” She shrugged as she sliced the salami ends and put them out on a piece of waxed paper for Gloxinia who gobbled them down.

“Oh, you are a hungry dog! Let me see what else I have for you to eat. How about some tuna?” asked the kind grocer opening a large can of tuna fish.

Gloxinia wagged her tail as she lapped up the tuna, oil and all. She was licking the last morsel from the side of the can, when a new scent reached her nose. Fresh bread was baking in the bakery next door. “Maybe I can help the baker, she thought.

Next door the baker removed a large pan from the oven. He handed Gloxinia a roll. It was crusty and fresh with plump raisins in its center.

Gloxinia was too full to walk all the way home. “I’ll get the paper later. Who would read it anyway? Everyone is so busy.”

She sat on the curb where a metal bridge takes the road out of the town and into the country. A man was pushing a shopping cart over the bridge. “Where are my prepositions?” he seemed to ask no one in particular.

“Your prepositions?” asked Gloxinia.

“I need them -- write my spoon poems. Prepositions are an important part__the recipe for spoon poems.” He made little gulps where the little words should have been.

“Poems aren’t made from recipes.”

“Oh but spoon poems are.”

“I’ve never tasted one. That’s true.” Gloxinia was beginning to feel hungry again.

“No one will understand my poems unless I find my prepositions. And he recited his most recent spoon poem for Gloxinia.

The sun rises the morning
and sets nights
please go the bakery
the corner
fresh rolls
I’d like one them
Butter right now.

“That’s a lovely poem.” said Gloxinia marveling at the images the spoon poem man evoked for her. But I don’t taste anything. Perhaps that’s because your prepositions are missing.”

“So you see what I mean?”

“I think I understand.” Gloxinia said kindly. .

“Now everyone who hears my spoon poems becomes hopelessly kerplexed.”

Gloxinia looked perplexed and sneezed. “Kerplexed”

“Bless you” said the spoon poem man.

“Y’you’re kerplexed.” Gloxinia sneezed again. Don’t you mean perplexed.

“One can’t be perplexed one’s prepositions.

“Without?” asked Gloxinia.

“Yes that’s it. I’m stuck.”

“But not out or in or any such thing.” sympathized Gloxinia. “Just stuck, Because without prepositions one is just plain stuck.”

“It’s very much__you describe it.” moaned the spoon poem man. “As I said, I was a quest.”

“On a quest?”

“Yes!” he exclaimed with gratitude.

“Where would you like this quest to take you?”

“Missing prepositions, course, so I can write my spoon poems. Don’t you understand. You’ll taste one just soon we cross the bridge where I think I might have left my prepositions.” promised the spoon poem man.

“What do they taste like?” Gloxinia wagged her bushy tail.

“Avocado sandwiches?”

“Some taste avocado.”

“With lettuce and sprouts for garnish?”

“If you like.” Promised the spoon poem man.

“Sounds delicious. I’ll help you find your prepositions if you like.”

“Oh that would be wonderful,” cried the spoon poem man.

“Perhaps you could prepare spoon poems for our lunch.”

“You will have many different kinds spoon poems.” he promised .

And Gloxinia began to accompany the spoon poem man and his cart.

“Where should we start the quest for your missing prepositions?” Gloxinia asked.

“I think I might have left them the sign lady’s gallery. It’s a ways the road but my prepositions, I’m not sure this is the right direction to take.”

“With me along it will be a great help,” promised Gloxinia. “I’m sure together we will have no trouble finding your prepositions.”

Gloxinia followed the spoon poem man and his cart over the bridge and out onto the quiet country road past a duck pond swept by low-hanging willow branches. The road wound around the pond and continued alongside a little stream. Gloxinia and the spoon poem man walked until they came to another bridge. A sign pointed to the ballet school on the other side. But on the bridge, a pointy-toed ballerina cried and cried as she stretched her leg out on the rail.

“Why are you crying so bitterly, little ballerina?” Gloxinia asked.

“Perhaps we can be of help to you. I am trying to help the spoon poem man find his prepositions and it wouldn’t be a lot of trouble to help you, too.

“Yes, don’t cry, little dancer.” said the spoon poem man. “We will both be helped this kind animal.”

“It’s the mother of the mean one. She told me not to dance.” The ballerina sobbed between plies in the third position and pointed to the other side of the bridge where the mother of the mean one stood guard. “If I cannot cross the bridge, I cannot go to the ballet school.”

“Feelings all too often can’t product the right words.” Gloxinia told the little ballerina. “Perhaps they didn’t mean to talk to you that way.”

“Oh, indeed!” commanded a stern voice and Gloxinia looked across the bridge to where the mother of the mean one stood with her owl-eyed daughter. The mean mother perfectly perched herself on pedestal shoes—the kind with long stems running to the ground. They reminded Gloxinia of the kinds of glass cups they use for melon balls, scoops of sherbet and other fancy things. What a shame to be occupied by such a one, thought Gloxinia. The mean one’s mother had a sharp beak and very fancy feathers and was altogether formidable. Her mean little daughter stood behind her and plied smug as can be. She was delighted to help her mother block the way. “She will not dance in there!” she insisted and pointed to the famous ballet school.

“We don’t care for her leptotard.” said her daughter.

“It’s a leotard and the only one I have.” cried the ballerina.

“Then perhaps you should come with us.” Gloxinia said to the ballerina. “We will find another way to cross I’m sure. And you could dance to a spoon poem when we find the spoon poem man’s prepositions.”

“Course. Course.” chortled the spoon poem man.

That made the ballerina happy and as she joined the travelers she heard the mean one cry to her mother. “Mother, why aren’t I getting a chance to dance to spoon poems, too?”

“Don’t be silly who ever heard of dancing to spoon poems. You will have the special dances. Not her.”

“Are you sure, Mother?” the mean one asked not quite sure as she watched the little ballerina follow the spoon poem man and Gloxinia back down the road. The little ballerina danced along the road doing triple pirouettes for each step Gloxinia took and the spoon poem man pushed his cart along.

“You have been such a great help to me.” The ballerina said hugging Gloxinia. “I will be very happy to help the spoon poem man find his prepositions.” And she gave the spoon poem man a very fond hug.

“Do you know where the sign lady’s gallery might be?” Gloxinia asked. “The Spoon Poem Man thinks he may have left his prepositions there.”

“As a matter of fact I do and most unfortunately we need to cross the bridge to get there.”

“Oh dear!” sighed the spoon poem man. “Now I’ll never find my prepositions.”

“Not to worry!” said Gloxinia. “We could go under the bridge. Under is just as good as over in most cases. I am a very strong swimmer and can ferry you both across.”

“But if we go under the bridge, we would have to go into the water.” said the little ballerina. “And I will get my tutu wet and ruin my pointe shoes.”

“And I myself am no use.” Sobbed the spoon poem man. “Not my prepositions.”

“Yes, I see your point.” Sighed Gloxinia. “Oh but you could ride on my back.”

“But cart will sink deep the river if I try to cross.”

“Yes that would be a problem. We must find another way to reach the sign lady’s gallery.” Gloxinia agreed.

“You could try making a wish,” said a voice and Gloxinia looked up down and around. “Where are you?”

“Right here,” said the voice.

Gloxinia turned and turned. She saw nothing but her own tail and the voice laughed as she chased it faster and faster.

The spoon poem man stared straight ahead without his prepositions it was useless for him to turn. “I see nothing.” He said sadly.

But the little ballerina turned on her pointe shoes. She saw a little yellow seed pod floating on the air. “Oh there you are!” she cried.

“I fell from the branch of a giant tree.” he laughed. “And caught a little breeze. The tree has to stay there forever but I am going to see the wide, wide world.”

“But shouldn’t you become a tree?” asked the little Ballerina. “Just as I will become a ballerina?”

“Not yet. Not yet!” cried the little yellow seed pod as he flapped about in the breeze. “My tree cannot leave. She stands there just like the bridge and what good is a bridge blocked by such mean ones?”

“We see what you mean.” replied Gloxinia. “But how can wishes help us cross?”

“You must go back to the bridge and make a wish on me.” Said the little seed pod. “I bring good luck.” And he fluttered off in the direction of the bridge. Gloxinia turned the spoon poem man’s cart around for him and he followed too.

When they returned to the bridge, the little seed pod fluttered into the little ballerina's hands. "Now close your eyes and make a wish and I will carry it off to the grand wish-maker."

"And can you carry wishes for the poor spoon poem man, too?" asked the kind little ballerina.

"Of course I can." Said the little seed pod and a special wish for this good animal."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" cried the spoon poem man.

"And as my wish is to help my friends, I can double thank you." Said Gloxinia.

"What are you doing?" asked the mean one.

"We're making wishes." said the little ballerina.

"What do you mean, making wishes?"

"Just like you see. The little seed pod has offered to carry all of our wishes to the grand wish-maker."

The mean one inspected the seed pod. "But that's my seed pod. You can't make wishes on my seed pod. Give it to me."

"No! The seed pod is off to see the wide, wide world." Cried the little ballerina. "Nobody can have him."

"Mother, mother!" cried the mean one. "She stole my seed pod."

"What? That nasty girl stole your seed pod."

"Yes and she was trying to make a wish on it."

"I didn't steal you seed pod." The little ballerina protested.

"Oh yes you did you nasty, nasty girl. And I will report your behavior to the ballet mistress." And she grabbed the seed pod right out of the little ballerina's hand.

“Here is your seed pod, darling. She will not take it from you again.”
Said the mean one’s mother.

The mean one stuck her tongue out at the little ballerina and then smiled. “I am going to press the seed pod into a book and he will stay with me forever and give me all the wishes I could want.”

“Oh dear cried Gloxinia, the spoon poem man, and the little ballerina. “We must help the little seed pod. If she presses him into a book, he won’t be able to see the wide, wide world.”

“You can’t help him.” said the mean one squeezing the little seed pod in her fist.

“But,” thought Gloxinia. “I think we can.”

“Didn’t he say he carries our wishes to the grand wish-maker.”

“Yes,” Said the cunning little seed pod in a muffled voice. “And my wish-maker is a great tree. You must get to my tree where there are many seed pods like me to make wishes on. Then you can wish me free.”

“If she can have more wishes, then I want more wishes, too.” Cried the mean one. “Why should I have only one wish when she can have many.”

“You are perfectly right, dear.” Said the mean one’s mother. “You must have more wishes from that tree, too. Where is this silly tree?”

“I can not go unless I am free. You must make a wish and blow on me. I will take you there.”

The mean one looked at the seed pod in the palm of her hand.

“Go on! Make a wish and blow on me.” The seed pod encouraged the mean one.

The mean one closed her eyes and wished and wished. Then she blew the seed pod into the wind.

“you must try to stay close to me because the breeze makes me flutter about.” The mean one tried to follow but her pirouettes were weak and she soon got out of breath. Her mother tried to help but broke the heel of her shoe.

The little ballerina had no trouble keeping up with the seed pod as he danced in the breeze. She twirled and twirled.. Gloxinia and the spoon poem man scurried as they tripped after her along the bank of the river.

The seed pod brought them to a lovely meadow. The wise tree stood close to the shore. Her big branches seemed to enfold the sky the water and all the butterflies, squirrels and the piano-sized cows sleeping in the meadow. And as the seed pod promised, there were many, many seed pods on the tree.

“Here we are.” Said the seed pod. “Now I must be off.”

“But won’t we see you to share our spoon poems?” Gloxinia didn’t want the little seed pod to leave.

“No, save me some for later. Now I must see the world. Perhaps we will meet again.”

When he fluttered away Gloxinia spoke to the tree. “We came to make a wish. Your seed pod told us you that you are the grand wish-maker and that you might help us to cross the river. The spoon poem man needs to find his prepositions and the little ballerina needs to dance but the mean one and her mother won’t let her cross the bridge.”

The noble tree spoke sadly. “I wish I could help. My seed pod was very much mistaken. I apologize that he brought you so far out of your way. As you see I no longer travel. I have everything I need right here on the bank of the river. My branches reach far but hardly far enough to let you cross. But I have often thought that if someone could hang a swing from my

branches, it could swing far across the river. I have every thing,” she said, “but a swing. If I had a swing I could help you to cross.”

“Oh but a swing would be easy,” cried Gloxinia. “You are indeed a very wise tree. I have seen many swings. A swing would be just the thing to get the ballerina and the spoon poem man across.”

And so the little ballerina and the spoon poem man made a very long rope from some long vines that twisted and climbed among the trees in a forest at the edge of the meadow. And Gloxinia helped by dragging it back to the tree. They found a large stick for a seat. When the swing was finished, the ballerina climbed into the tree and tied a firm knot around one of her great branches. Then she slid gracefully down the rope and onto the seat.

“Who will push?” she asked.

“I will push.” Said the spoon poem man. “But who will push me?”

“I will push you both.” Said Gloxinia.

“But who will push you?” asked the ballerina.

“But I can swim across and so I will help the two of you to cross. And then I will swim myself.”

Gloxinia pushed the ballerina to the other bank and when she descended onto her toes, she let go of the swing and sent it back across.

The spoon poem man held onto his cart as he climbed onto the seat. With one huge nudge, Gloxinia sent him across the river, too.

“Will you send a spoon poem back to me when you find your prepositions?” asked the tree. “Otherwise I will have no other way of knowing that you have found the spoon poem man’s prepositions. My seed pod has left and I must stand here by the bank of the river.”

“And that would help you, kind tree.” said Gloxinia. I would very much like to help you since you have been such a great help to my friends.

Then she waved goodbye to the tree and swam across. She found the water quite refreshing after so much traveling. When she got to the other bank Gloxinia shook the water out of her fur and when she was dry, the trio continued on.

The sign lady’s gallery was in a small wooden house with no windows—only signs pointing everywhere. A sign on the door read. Knock and enter!

Inside they found a large room with many more signs. Large signs, small signs. Black and white signs. Red and white signs. Hanging signs. Some said welcome and some “go away” and “no trespassing”

There were standing signs, wearing signs, flying signs and falling signs. And in the midst of all the signs, the sign lady sat at her desk. A wart sat high on her nose. She rejoiced to see the spoon poem man.

“I made your sign but then you left and I had no way to finish it.” She pointed to a large sign the kind made for a person to wear front and back. On the front it said.

SORRY THIS EXHIBIT B
H E
A E
S N
TEMPORARILY REMOVED

The sign on the back read:

THIS SHEET	I
L	N
E	T
F	E
T	N
	T
B	I
L	O
A	N
N	A
K	L
V E R Y	Y

“I could not get back.”

“I can well imagine.” Scolded the sign lady. “You left your prepositions and since without them neither you nor I had any way of knowing where you were going, I put them away in my special closet. I can’t imagine getting anywhere without prepositions.”

“It was very difficult as you can tell but I had help from my very kind friends. Can you get the prepositions me?” begged the spoon poem man.

“If you promise to pay.” Said the sign lady. “I am very hungry.”

“We are too.” Said Gloxinia. “And without his prepositions, he cannot write his spoon poems. And he cannot sell his spoon poems without his signs. The little ballerina will not have spoon poems for her dance and she won’t be able to get to the dance school.

“If that’s the case,” said the sign lady, “I will fetch his prepositions right away. And she did.

The spoon poem man wore his new sign front and back with himself in between. It said, Spoon Poems for Sale. This is the poem the spoon poem man wrote for lunch:

After lunch
 On lychee nuts.
 With sprouts on toast
 And avocado in pitas.
 With icing in cupcake centers.
 Within the bounds of propriety
 She ate with relish.
 Among her peers.
 Between innings
 For one year
 Before bed time
 During recess
 Under the table
 Over treetops
 On a swing.
 Across the river
 Along the bank.
 Through the woods
 On the radio
 With pleasure
 In a hurry..
 By good luck.
 Without trying
 Into a tizzy.

“It was a wonderful poem.” They all said.

Gloxinia didn’t want to offend him but she and the little ballerina were still hungry. “Please come back to my house for strudel.”

When they arrived at Gloxinia’s house, the strudel was warm and cinnamon smells filled the air. “Oh Gloxinia,” cried Aunt Patsy and Aunt Sylvia. “We were very worried about you. You ate only one breakfast and we thought you might be ill.”

“I was busy helping.” said Gloxinia.

“Well now you must eat, dear dog. Uncle Henry has finished the wallpaper and you are just in time for strudel.”

When they were finished eating they sat under a tree in Gloxinia’s back yard and heard a spoon poem for desert. The ballerina danced and danced and then Gloxinia and Uncle Henry brought her to the ballet school where she danced to a spoon poem. The ballet mistress told her she could dance it again for the spring recital. The mean one cried and cried and so the little ballerina let her dance to the spoon poem, too.

That night Gloxinia went upstairs through her new hall of roses. She fell asleep wondering about the little seed pod and dreamed a spoon poem of her own.

THE LITTLE SEED POD

A seed pod fell from a high branch on a tall tree. A breeze came and carried her along.

“Breeze, keep me with you.” begged the little seed pod. “Once I am in the ground I will grow roots deep in the soil and have to stay for a very long time.” The little yellow seed pod floated on the breeze far above the ground. She passed a bridge that connected a city over a wide, wide river. “Poor bridge,” said the seed pod. “You will never get to see the wonderful world.”

“I am happy to stand here forever.” Said the bridge to the seed pod. The city lies on both sides of the river. Without me the people in the city can’t go across from one side to the other. They can’t go to school, to work or to buy things in the shops.”

“I will never stand forever like you.” Said the seed pod waving good bye to the bridge.

She passed over a green hill where a small boy was flying his kite. The seed pod circled the kite high in the sky. “Poor kite.” She said. “When the little boy pulls in the string,

you might find yourself caught in a tree and there you will stay forever.”

The seed pod floated on and on.

A balloon winked at the seed pod. “Oh, happy seed pod, you will not float on the breeze forever.”

A group of children were out to gather autumn leaves. They tried to catch the seed pod but she floated through their tiny hands and on in the breeze.

The breeze began to carry a chill. Then it brought along the icy rains. When the icy rains turned to snow, the seed pod fell to the ground wet and miserable. Feet trampled her on the sidewalk. She hid in a crack.

How comfortable the seed pod began to feel resting there all winter under a deep blanket of snow. By spring time, she had brown a root deep in the soil. A small shoot peeked out of the crack in the sidewalk. It grew a leaf. By the end of the summer, the seed pod had become a small tree. At the end of many summers the seed pod had become a tall, tall tree. She could see far in the wide, wide world. She remembered her days as a tiny seed pod. Her branches floated in the breeze while a family picnicked in her shade. She saw many things and was content.

When Gloxinia woke up the next morning she found a little tree growing from the crack in her front sidewalk.

“Uncle Henry, do you believe in wishes,” She asked him.