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Girl's idea about fairies turns into book

Kirby Larson, Columnist

I've been looking forward to writing today's column for quite awhile; in the case of the first title below, it's been nearly four years! When I originally heard a bit of "The Fairies of Nutfolk Wood" in the Writing for Children class I was teaching at Cascadia Community College, I knew I was listening to a manuscript I'd one day see in print. Local author, Barb Bentler Ullman, took an idea her daughter had about woodland fairies and ran with it. You can learn more about the story behind the story at Barb's web site, <http://barb.bentler.us>.

"The Fairies of Nutfolk Wood," by Barb Bentler Ullman, Katherine Tegen Books/HarperCollins, 2006.

So many kids are dealing with divorced parents these days. And Willa is one of those kids. And, like many kids, this new situation has her stomach in knots. Literally. The poor kid can barely eat. Change hits Willa hard, even to the point of stealing her dreams. But one night, a frightening dream has a moment of light and Willa figures out the first step in her healing process. She wants to move to the country to find the "peace and courage" the dream voice promised.

Mama is agreeable – in fact, Mama would've agreed to just about anything to get out of Grandma Cookie's house – and the two of them pack up and move to Plunkit. While Willa may have dreamed of a cozy cottage with flowers and a picket fence, Mama took one look at her pocket book and decided the dilapidated trailer in Wicket's Wood would do just fine. Willa is dismayed and disheartened by their new home, but the woods that surround it pull at her. At first, Willa's convinced the odd things she sees and hears are because she hasn't been eating or sleeping well. Otherwise, how would you explain the trillium growing and blooming, in seconds, right in front of her eyes? Or the voices? Or the sparkles in the air?

As Willa wrestles with this mystery, she gets more settled in at Wicket's Wood. She befriends the elderly Hazel Wicket and that leads to a friendship with an artistic but hurting boy named Vincent. And while Willa's summer affirms Gramby June's words that "These are difficult times to be human," it also eases Willa's fear of change. So despite the divorce, a nasty run-in with a bulldozer, and fairy encounters that may or may not have happened, at the end of the book Willa can honestly say to her friend, "It was a fine summer, Hazel. It was the best."

This quiet, charming fantasy left me hoping that the whispers I hear on the breeze as I garden may be Willa's nutfolks.

Kirby Larson, of Kenmore, is a children's book reviewer and the author of several children's books.