

## Zel da the Clown

**W**hen the world was young and the mountains first leapt up from the sea, you were there. When the fields and jungles were first alive with trees and grass, you were there. When the first animal left the life-giving ocean and took its first breath of air, you were there to welcome it. You are eternal. You were born the day the very first flower bloomed and will live until the very last blossom dies. You are Bellwether Marigold, Princess of the Flower Sprites.

You have enjoyed your long, carefree life. You have danced with satyrs. You have cavorted in the skies with Pegasus. You have sipped nectar and dined on ambrosia. You have seen mortals come and go and admire your beauty and the beauty of your subjects. You have loved your life and you were sad to leave it, but you had found an even greater love.

A few months ago – a short time really, and yet time is now running out – the circus was in town. Well, while you, technically, live any place there are flowers, you consider your home to be the dark forests of Fandonia. And a few months ago, an American circus passed through those forests.

You were curious, so you watched as they prepared for the show. It was fascinating, all the bright colors and unusual people. They couldn't see you – as a Sprite, mortals can only see you when you wish it, and even then they must have the sight. You watched the exotic animals and the exotic people. How happy everyone was. Even the performers seemed to be happy. It was magical, but a different form of magic than what you were used to.

But what really made you take notice was when you saw a jester of some sort in outlandish makeup entertaining a small child. The child was unhappy, but the man produced a long elastic tube that he filled with air and the twisted to form the shape of a dog.\* He then presented the toy to the child with great ceremony. The child was delighted and laughed happily for the rest of the day.

This man intrigued you. Everywhere he went, he brought smiles to all that he met. He was so kind, so gentle, so caring. And you could tell from his face,

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\* Acolytes of historical accuracy take note: rubber toy balloons were available for sale as early as 1825. Balloon sculpture probably started in the 1920s, just after the Golden Age of the Circus. Our game is, of course, a work of *fiction!*

so lonely. And you felt something, then, that you had never felt before in your long long life. You had felt joy, tenderness, warmth, and caring. But for the first time ever, you felt love.

But you knew it was not to be. You are a princess and Binky – his full name is Herman Binkowicz – is a mortal. These things always lead to mischief.

But the more you thought about Binky, his kind heart, his desire to make people happy, his overwhelming loneliness, the more you loved him. You knew there could only be one way. You would have to give up your immortality. You would have to become mortal, human, and try to win Binky's heart.

There was only one way. You had to visit the Old Woman of the Woods. Despite her name, the Old Woman of the Woods is not a true human. She is a forest spirit, like yourself, but darker and far more powerful. She is the sum total of the fear and secrecy of the woods on a moonless night. When an owl hoots in the darkness, when a coyote howls lonesome at the moon, when the insects all go silent at once, that is the Old Woman breathing. If you are even in the woods at night and your heart catches in your throat for just one second, you have crossed her shadow and you best run before her eyes turn to you and you are not seen again. She is malevolent, yes, but fear is a potent thing, and she is very, very powerful.

Undaunted, you went to her and asked her to turn you mortal. The old Woman of the Woods eyed you up and down and grunted an agreement. However, there was a price... and a condition. The price was your lovely voice. Oh how you loved to sing in the sunrise and harmonize with the summer showers. But it was a small price to pay for your love. Until you kissed the kiss of true love, you would not have a voice.

The condition was the problem, a time limit. You had to kiss the kiss of true love by sunset, of the fifth day of the fifth month after you made the deal, or you would become the Old Woman of the Woods' property forever.

There are others who have failed her conditions. The old Woman of the Woods has many servants, all of whom are her property forever. It was huge risk, but true love is worth it.

So the Old Woman of the Woods cast a spell on you and sent you to meet Binky. But true love is not easily won, and there are still many difficulties to overcome.

You joined the circus while it was touring in the small country of Fandonia. Most of the people there are nice, and have given you the opportunity to try and fit in. You have become a clown yourself, so you can be near Herman. You tumble and perform tricks; it is fairly easy given the acrobatics and dancing you've had millennia to perfect.

But things have not worked out the way you wanted. For one thing, the third clown, a strange man named Zimmie, is rude, obnoxious, and downright mean. He requires absolute privacy when putting on makeup for a show, or taking it off and kicks you out of the communal makeup trailer. (Herman, being a star, has his own trailer). Zimmie is just plain not nice. And you can't even stick up for yourself because you cannot talk!

And you cannot read or write either. As a Sprite, you never needed to learn, although you could recognize the language of the Fey if you needed to. But humans use a strange written language called English. You do not know it. One bright spot, the fiancée of the man running the circus has offered to teach you. Daisy Belle has been teaching you to read and write. She has been very nice to you. Some others have said that Daisy is mean, and doesn't like circus folk, but she has always been nice to you. But you can't stick up for her because you can't talk!

Worse yet, there is a human mage in the circus. Magi have always been a problem for your kind. They can coerce, command, and compel. And while this one does not know your true name, her very nature gives her power over you. You have no choice but to obey every command, to serve every request. Again you are lucky in that this particular mage – Susan Wildes, the Strong Woman – does not seem to know that she can command you. She seems like a nice person, but you have been keeping your distance just in case.

And then there is the agent of the Old Woman of the Woods. Bobo the Dog Faced Boy is spying on you for her. You recognized him immediately as one of her servants. You do not know why the Old Woman of the Woods has decided to send Bobo, unless... yes, she wants to make certain that you fail to get your love. Well, you know now that she is up to no good and you are ready to defend against whatever Bobo decides to do.

But worst of all is the thing that may bring your plans crashing to a halt. Herman doesn't like you. As soon as you joined the circus, you went up to see him. You were all ready to try to explain, somehow, about your love, but after a few minutes, you started laughing at him. You couldn't help it; the laughter bubbled out of you – or it least it would have if you could have made a noise, as it was, it looked like you were suffering from a fit of some sort. Herman shook his head and walked away.

And it is like that every time. You cannot go near him without bursting into silent laughter. Herman won't even talk to you anymore. Could this be some sort of additional curse from the Old Woman of the Woods? That does not make sense. She always tells everything about the conditions of your deal; that way she cannot possibly be held at fault when she claims you for all eternity.

You are very disturbed by all of this, and more so because time is running out. The circus returned to the United States after its trip through Europe and already it is the fifth day of the fifth month since the deal was made. If you do not kiss the kiss of true love with Binky by sunset (the end of the game), you will become property of the Old Woman of the Woods forever! Oh, what shall you do?

### ROLEPLAYING HINT

You are desperately worried, not only because of your own impending doom, but also because of the powers that you sense in the circus. Many people here frighten you. You love Herman very much, and desperately want him to love you back, but you do not know how to break through his wall of depression and the fact that you silently laugh whenever you are near him.

### THE OTHER CHARACTERS:

Colonel Sebastian T. Rawhide: He allowed you to join the circus even though you cannot speak. He has a good heart and you hope that he succeeds in life.

Daisy Belle: Colonel Rawhide's fiancée. She doesn't care for the circus, but has always been nice to you. She has been teaching you to read English, a difficult proposition at best.

Jack Bungling: The older of the two Bungling Brothers, owners of the Bungling Brothers Circus. You have never met the Bungling Brothers.

The Flying Credenza Brothers: They keep to themselves a great deal. They have their own private wagon, and they don't let anyone else in.

Herman Binkowicz, "Binky" the Clown: Binky was one of the original performers. He is an excellent performer and has a big heart. You know he is kind and gentle, and very very lonely. You desperately love him, but you cannot even face him any more because of your silent laughing.

Susan Wildes, The Strong Lady: She scares you. She *seems* nice enough, but you know that she wields the power of magic. This means that she has power over you and that you must do whatever she asks. So far, it has been innocuous, and you do not even think that she knows the power she has available.

Franklin Winters, The Lion Tamer: He enjoys partaking of the spirits. He also has a good way with animals. You respect him for that.

The Townshed Brothers: They were also part of the original circus. They are nice people, but they constantly argue. They are a bit strange.

Helena Ferez, the Bearded Lady: She seems nice, although you do not know her that well.

Peter Wainwright, the Fire Eater/Sword Swallow: There is something wrong about him. He is not a mage, but the air of the supernatural lingers around him. You do not have to obey him, but you get the feeling he is not quite what he seems.

Bobo the Dog Faced Boy: He joined the circus a few days after you did. And you know why. You recognize him as a servant of the Old Woman of the Woods. You know that she is using Bobo to spy on you and you suspect that he is the reason why you cannot be near Herman, but you aren't sure *how*.

Señora Mysterioso: She scares you a little bit because she reminds you of the Old Woman of the Woods. But she is not a mage and she has no supernatural powers, so you do not truly fear her. Her fortune telling act is all misdirection and sleight of hand.

The Masked Rider: Also joined the circus in Europe. You don't know too much about The Masked Rider, but the Rider's talent with horses cannot be denied.

The Knife Thrower: The Knife Thrower also joined the circus in Europe. The Knife Thrower likes privacy, but is very talented. You saw some knives being thrown perfectly, while the thrower was blindfolded.

Lydia the Tattooed Lady: She joined the circus just before it left for Europe. She's a very nice person and very patient with you when you try to communicate.

Zimmie the Clown: You share a trailer with Zimmie and you couldn't hate it more. He is rude and nasty and has to be alone all the time. You wish you could share a trailer with Herman instead.

The Great Zamboni: He arrived today asking for a job. Colonel Rawhide decided to give him a chance. He is a mage as well, a true mage in full flush with his powers. He wields dark and sinister energy. He can command you, and you think he knows it. Best to steer clear.

### **WELL KNOWN CHARACTERS NOT IN GAME:**

Senator Hiram Bungling: He is the father of the Bungling Brothers. You don't know much about

American politics, but Senator Bungling is apparently very powerful.

John Bungling: The younger of the Bungling Brothers. You've never met him.

Uma the Unicyclist: While in France, on the return part of the tour, there were a couple of bizarre accidents. You didn't know Uma that well, but it was still sad when she slipped off her high unicycle and severely twisted her ankle.

Preston the Prestidigitator: His act also was ruined while in France. While he was sawing a woman in half, a panel swung open revealing the illusion. He was booed out of the tent and Colonel Rawhide had to fire him. He was not a true mage, though. He relied on illusion, misdirection, and sleight of hand for his act.

### **ABILITIES**

Combat: 8 cards.

Cannot Speak: You cannot vocalize a sound. You cannot talk, sob, laugh, or yell. You may pantomime actions, but a poor understanding of English means that you cannot use standard charade devices (syllables, homonyms, "sounds like"). ASL is right out.

Cannot Read or Write: You do not know how to read or write. You may not read any written documents. You may write your name (Zelda) as often as you wish. You may write a total of ten words during the game (keep track). None of these words can be more than five letters in length. Every ten minutes that Daisy Belle tutors you in reading and writing resets the uses of this ability and adds one to the words' length in letters.

Sense Magic: You can tell if someone or something is inherently magical. You can also recognize the language of the Fey if you see or hear it.

Must Obey Mages: You must follow any direct command given to you by Susan Wildes or The Great Zamboni, even if it is against your own self interests or is self destructive. The one exception is commands that deal with Binky, your love for him overpowers this compulsion.

Binky the Clown: You find Binky so hilarious that after a few minutes of listening to him (or interacting with him in any way), you must burst into silent laughter, no matter what the topic of conversation is. You cannot stop laughing until he leaves, and afterwards, you cannot clearly recall what he was talking about (or doing), but – hey – that Binky sure is funny.