



THE BOY WHO GREW FLOWERS

Rink Bowagon was a boy from the deep country. He lived out past where the blacktop road became a dirt road, and the dirt road petered out into a little footpath.

The path wound through the ancient trees of a wild forest, hopped Black Bear Creek, headed all the way up Lonesome Mountain, made a right-hand turn and ran smack into the Bowagons' door.

The Bowagons were the only folks who lived on Lonesome Mountain.

The townspeople argued as to whether it was because they were such strange folk that they lived there, or whether it was because they lived there that they were such

strange folk.

However, everyone agreed that the Bowagon clan was a hotbed of strange and exotic talents.

Rink's uncle Dud liked to tame rattlesnakes, and his brothers and cousins were all shape-shifters.

But Rink himself had the most special talent of all: during the full moon he sprouted flowers all over his body. It was a beautiful sight, and they were the prettiest, sweetest-smelling and





longest-lasting blossoms you ever saw.

Some folks might stay home sick in bed if they happened to sprout—but not Rink.

Every morning following a full moon, his mama would gently clip the flowers from her boy and off he would go to school.

Now, Rink liked school, at least he liked the thinking and reading part. But he was shy and quiet and different from the other children, so the teacher gave him a seat at the back of the room and did not bother with him. As for the children, they had all heard rumors about Rink's strange relatives, so they stayed at a safe distance from him.

When one day came Angelina Quiz, a girl whose family was in the ballroom dancing business and had just moved from Tuscaloosa.

She was what some would call a plain girl. She had an easy manner, a luminous smile, and her right leg was shorter than her left by an inch. She always wore a flower behind her right ear.

Rink liked her straight away.

So did everyone else. Angelina was always surrounded by friends. Rink observed her from a distance.

"She is forthright and honest, yet always kind," he thought. He also admired the flowers she wore behind her ear, a different one every day, and all of them as lovely as she.

As for Angelina Quiz, she soon wondered about this quiet boy who sat alone at the back of the class. So she asked the other children about him.

"His uncle Dud has a pet rattlesnake called Fat Lucy and she sleeps on the end of his bed!" hissed Fuster Shrimp.

"And his mother uses a bowling bag for a purse!" giggled Shirleyanne Smeeth.

"And his granny was raised by wolves!" snickered Gertrude Prugg.

Angelina did not laugh. "Why won't anyone talk to him?" she asked. The others fell silent. The question rattled in their minds.



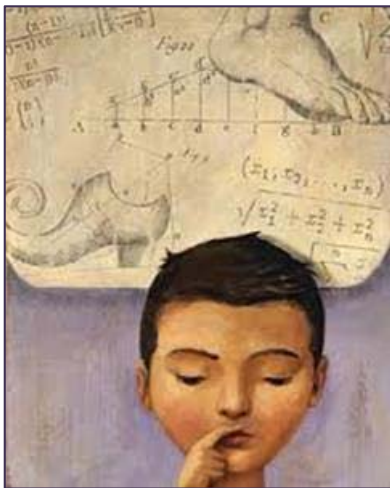
One afternoon, the teacher announced that the school dance would be held that Saturday night at the church hall. Several of her classmates asked Angelina to go, but she smiled bravely and shook her head.

“I wouldn’t be much of a dancing partner,” she laughed.

Rink was struck by the wistful note he heard in her voice.

“She comes from a dancing family,” he thought. “I bet she loves music. I bet she’d really like to go to that dance.”

The minute the teacher’s back was turned, Rink slipped out the door. No one noticed except Angelina, who glanced back at his empty chair every now and then. She marveled at how his absence could take the shine off such a pretty, sunny day.



When Rink reached his home high on Lonesome Mountain, he went straight to his uncle Dud’s room. He rummaged under the bed until he came up with several feet of Fat Lucy’s shucked-off skin.

Next, he dug through his mama’s bowling bag until he found a needle and spool of silk thread. Then, in the tumbledown shed off the kitchen, he turned up an old leather mule saddle.

Rink sat down and cleared his mind. He thought intently about Angelina’s feet.

He pictured their shape and size and the inch of space between her right foot and the floor. Then he cut and stitched and glued. He worked right through from Thursday afternoon until Saturday morning.

When Rink was finally done, there on the table stood the loveliest pair of snakeskin slippers that have ever been seen this side of Black Bear Creek.

The sole of the right slipper was one inch thicker than the left, so that Angelina could stand true and straight and tall. Rink imagined her dancing. He



thought that thought so long, and the feeling deep inside him was so pleasant, that even though the full moon had not yet risen, he sprouted a bunch of wild pink roses from the top of his head.

That afternoon, Rink followed the footpath down through the forest, across Black Bear Creek, along the dirt road, on to the blacktop road and up a hill.

Halfway up the hill, he opened a small gate and walked up the little path that led right to Angelina's front porch.

Angelina was helping her mama sew up a fancy new tango dress. The whole house was quiet, and every little snip of the scissors made a sad little tweak in her heart. She thought about Rink and how she had missed him at school all day Friday.

When Angelina heard a knock at the door, her heart flipped. There stood Rink, with a



bunch of wild pink roses in his left hand and a pair of snakeskin slippers in his right.

"These are for you," he said as he offered the slippers to her. "If you wear these, you'll dance just fine."

Angelina wriggled her bare toes into the slippers then and there. For the first time in her life, she felt herself stand up straight. She took one step, then another, and then she did a little practice dance step. Angelina looked at Rink with delight.

"Will you be my dancing partner?" she asked.

"I don't know how to do that kind of dancing," said Rink shyly.

"I'll teach you!" cried Angelina. "I've watched my family so many times I know all of the steps by heart!"

She took his hand, and they danced together down the path.

After the dance, Rink walked Angelina home. They stopped on the way and sat under an old buttonball tree. Angelina told Rink about her family, and he told her about his.

Then, with a pounding heart, he revealed to her the fact that he sprouted flowers all over himself during the full moon.

Angelina smiled with delight. Then she bent down and showed Rink where the flower she wore grew right



out from behind her ear!

From that day on, Angelina Quiz and Rink Bowagon were fast friends. Angelina wore her snakeskin slippers every day. And when the slippers wore out, Rink made her another pair.

He has been making all of her shoes for twenty-five years now. The two of them have their own house up on Lonesome Mountain — only these days, it's called Sweet Blossom Hill.

Gardening is how Angelina and Rink earn their living. Actually, it's a family business. You see, every one of their seven children was born with a green thumb.



Jen Wojtowicz
The boy who grew flowers
Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2005