

The Little Plant In The West

By Jeff Schultz & Jim Hunt

Once upon a time, long long ago, in a not so far away land, a bright and handsome young man named Ricardo decided to leave the comfort of the farm on which he had grown up. He ventured out into the land seeking to fulfill the calling in his life.

As he was traveling he came across a small greenhouse in the forest where he found two elderly gardeners working away. He peeked his head tentatively inside the door to see just what they were doing. They were huddled around a small green plant in a clay pot, trimming and snipping and tying twine to it. "Give me that bucket" barked one of the old gardeners. So Ricardo reached down and handed it toward him. "No, not that way" said the other gentleman. "Always hand buckets with the handle forward and tipped at a ten degree angle". So Ricardo took note and did as asked.

After several hours of toiling over the plant, the gardeners said to young Ricardo "come with us, we must go about the village and seek out sales on semi precious tools and equipment and fishing tackle". As they rode along Ricardo finally spoke up and asked the question that he'd wanted to ask all day. "What is it we are doing back there with that small green plant in the clay bucket?" The old gardeners looked at each other, not sure that they wanted to let an outsider in on their secrets. They could see in his eyes that the young man was trust worthy, and finally they answered. "We are building a magical plant. We grew this real nice strong vine, and now we are grafting different branches to it. When we are done, it will grow fruit like no one else has ever been able to do before." said the confident old gardener.

Later that evening, after the old gardeners went home to nap, young Ricardo sneaked back into the greenhouse to continue on with the work of the old gentlemen. He went and gathered some branches he had seen in his travels, and grafted them to the vine. As the days went on the plant grew stronger and more beautiful. Young Ricardo was pouring more and more of himself into it. He recalled his times on his fathers' farm how he had been taught to fertilize the plants. So he began fertilizing it with healthy doses of caring, trust, encouragement, and compassion. And when Ricardo and the old gardeners would give the plant some of their magical food the branches would grab hold of it and pass it from one to the other, transferring it through out its foliage. And then, magically, fruit would appear. It was large and delicious fruit; and it was plentiful.

One day the gardeners pulled young Ricardo aside and said to him "You have worked hard and we have achieved much. This plant is now more of you than us, so we leave it in your care." And one gardener went off to the north country where the fishing is good; and the other went to the south where the grass is green and the girls are pretty.

Ricardo continued to tend to the plant. He would fertilize it and observe it. He had a gift for knowing just what it needed. When he saw a branch whose leaves were wilting, he would give it just what it needed. Occasionally he had to prune a branch, but always delicately and with a tear in his eye. The plant became so strong and healthy that he knew all he had to do was to continue to bring the magic food to it; the plant would grow its sweet and beautiful fruit.

Word of Ricardo and his magical plant spread throughout the kingdom. When the king heard tell of the abundance being produced, he scoffed and said, "Uhhg, nothing of greatness ever comes from the west, and the very best plants are here in my private gardens." So the arrogant king never ventured over to see the amazing plant in the west, or to learn of

the fertilizer that Ricardo had used... Eventually the old king was overthrown and a new and even more corrupt king came into power. When his consultants told him of the magical plant, he devised a plot. "We will hold a contest, and we will invite this Ricardo to enter, and then the entire world will know that my plants produce the best fruit." When Ricardo brought his fruit before the judges it was obvious that there was something special about it. The king could not deny that the plant in the west had produced something special.

The evil king had his soldiers grab hold of Ricardo. They lashed him to one of the king's biggest and ugliest vines. The king said to him you will not leave until this plant produces fruit even greater than that puny little plant in the west. And so he went to work trying his best to duplicate the magic. He would frequently break free of the king's ties to the big ugly plant and go off to be sure that the little plant was fed.

As time went on the king's demands became great, Ricardo was sent off to work in gardens in far away lands. The garden that Ricardo had previously toiled so diligently was being carelessly cast aside by the King.

Even the King's empire it's self like any resource misused, was faltering. Many plants in the King's gardens now wilted and died. Gardens left unattended or neglected do not produce succulent fruit. This was a lesson the evil King learned too late, and the evil King died because of it.

The branches on the little plant in the west had learned from Ricardo. They fed each other small doses of care, compassion, trust and encouragement. And the plant continued to stand up tall. But over time less and less of the magic food was delivered to be converted into fruit. Some of the branches dropped off and left the vine. Other gardeners heard of the plant and had heard of what Ricardo had done and began plucking branches from the plant and grafting them to their own plants.

Drought and blight began to overcome the little plant in the west. The once mighty plant was now a mere stalk with a few tired branches and very little of the sweet fruit waiting to be delivered. The King's poor gardening practices had taken a severe toll on the plant. Surely there were still great gardeners that could read our message scratched in the soil beside that plant. "Feed this plant, It is a magical plant. It once produced the greatest fruit in all the land and it can do so again."

One day, three new gardeners visited the small plant in the west. These three were worldly gardeners that had tended and nourished gardens all over the land. Francesco, the steely leader of the three had transformed scorched earth gardens into an oasis in the past. Nevins & Ashford had studied gardening under the tutelage of Francesco. They too could transform apparently dry lifeless ground into a vast lush green flourishing plant.

These three worldly gardeners could see the writing scratched into the hard dry ground that the other previous visitors had failed to find. To them, the little plant in the west was a rare gem among gardens. If tended correctly, the little plant could become a mighty vine again. Its branches reaching to new gardens never before imagined. It would take the skillful direction and wisdom of the new gardeners just as the original gardeners had done so long ago.

The first challenge at hand was to procure the little plant in the west from the evil King's henchmen. Battles were waged and at times it seemed that the three gardeners dream plant would wither and die before they could tend to it. With the determination of the crusaders, they fought on.

The adversaries in these great battles jostled and thrust at each other always looking for the others' weaknesses. With due diligence battlefield plans were formed, adjusted, and

executed. At last, after a year long war for the control of the little plant in the west, it ended. The three worldly gardeners stood in the center of the coliseum, victorious.

Now they had to begin work in the garden. It became their responsibility to fertilize and nourish the little plant in the west. So proud were they of their garden, a sign was erected to tell the world of the value seen in the little plant in the west by the worldly gardeners. It was simple letters on a white field, WPI. The garden immediately responded to the attention.

With a firm but knowledgeable hand the gardeners began the transformation. Careful pruning of the dry less productive branches were trimmed from the feeble stalk to help the remaining sections to survive. As Ricardo and the original gardeners of this plant had done in the past, new branches were grafted in to add strength and support. This new attention and nurturing caused green blossoms to begin to appear.

With the diligence and resilience of a hearty desert plant after a long awaited rain, the old branches of the original plant began to grow into new areas. The old branches gained strength and confidence. The little plant in the west was alive and growing. Word of its rebirth began to spread throughout the kingdom.

New visitors began the pilgrimage to see the little plant in the west. Some had tasted the fruit from the plant in the past and wanted to see if it still existed. Others came to see what fruit was available from the plant that they could use. The three worldly gardeners beamed with pride and surprise. Even they could scarcely believe the growth that the little plant in the west was experiencing.

It was as if the worldly gardeners would give the plant some of their magical food and the branches of the plant would grab hold of it and pass it from one to the other, transferring it through out its foliage. And then, magically, fruit would appear. It was large and delicious fruit; and it was plentiful.

The story of the little plant in the west continues today. Its final chapters are far from written. It is a story that began in a greenhouse in the forest by three wise old gardeners. Those wise old gardeners passed on their wisdom and skill to the likes of Ricardo. Who took hold of that wisdom and spread it through the branches of the plant for all to use. The three worldly gardeners Francesco, Nevins & Ashford could see the promise in the plant even though the evil King had nearly killed the little plant in the west. They courageously perused their dream garden in spite of overwhelming odds and doubters.

This story will not end due in part to a sturdy root system that has supported the plant through the harshest of weather. It continues as a testament to its leaves and branches that held on fast when storms ravaged the country side. The little plant in the west will always hold an important place in the garden of the kingdom.