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The War of the Flowers

By Brenda Cooper

12 January 2004

I pulled up the tent flap and whispered, "Hi, Cherry, Mommy's home."

Long thin fingers squeezed mine. "Hi Mommy. Hilary Hippo is eating your flowers."

The tent door slipped shut, the lacy data display material sounding like two palms rubbing roughened skin together. I twisted onto my back and looked at our world, holding Cherry next to me. She was right. The electronic hippo was finishing off the last of the spindly yellow flowers I'd completed just before going to work.

"Gramma took good care of you?" I asked.

"She visited me twice. She came in real person for lunch." Cherry's lips were tight against her face, stretched long and thin, somewhere between smile and frown.

Mother must have stayed longer than usual; Cherry's fine red hair twisted in a neat braid, its ragged end curling near her waist.

Cherry narrowed her eyes at the hippo, a swirl of brown pixels with yellow flowers hanging from the sides of its smile. She laughed and wagged a finger at her creation. "Hilary -- don't eat Mom's flowers!"

I laughed at her delight with the hippo's misbehavior. "All right Hilary," I threatened, still laughing, "I'll fix it so you stay away from my flowers!" I opened a maker window on the opposite wall so I wouldn't disturb Cherry's view. We had a rule that we didn't watch each other create. I dragged a salty taste onto the deep gold stamens. Simple, elegant. "Look out, Mommy's coming to garden!"

I rolled Cherry on top of me so she giggled while I slapped the world stopped.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

