



## The Moxie Plant

Fiction by Marlene T. Bell

At the bottom of our street, on the other side of the big street, is an old Moxie plant. Not the kind that has leaves, the kind that is a factory.

Sometimes I save all the old tonic bottles to get money deposits at the factory. I bring the bottles there in my brother's wagon. I get a dime a bottle. Then I can go to Wolfie's store and get some penny candy. I like to buy fake white cigarettes and look like I'm smoking. Like the big kids.

I tasted a Moxie tonic once. Very disgusting. It was sort of like sour cough syrup. It reminded me of gasoline. I don't know anyone who drinks Moxie, so I don't know what they do with the bottles of it coming down off the conveyer belt that is all little metal wheels on wires.

I know the kids in the Moxie man, Mr. Edgerly's, family. But I can't play with those kids because I'd have to cross the big street. Hmm. It is okay for me to cross the street to go to Mary Anne Campbell's house down the path through the big pine tree woods. I don't get it.

I don't know if I should tell you this, but there's something weird going on in the old shingled house beside that factory where the Moxie man's family lives. The girl is one year older than me, so she's eleven. And guess what? Her father uses her like a wife. That's what I heard.

She's very pretty and her name is Connie, for Cornelia Edgerly. She looks like Snow White or Rose Red, on account of her white skin and black hair. I don't think that using her like a wife means doing housework, do you? I think it means something bad. I want to rescue her from the weird father who makes weird tonic that nobody ever heard of.

But everybody hates Connie. I'm not sure why. Come to think of it, I've never seen her in school, and they're not Catholic, so she isn't in sister school. If the father is bad, shouldn't he be the one in trouble?

She is always smiling. I don't know why, do you? Well, she wants to be friends. But she can never get out to play. I would run away if I was her.



Self Portrait, by Marlene Bell

My mother is mad at her mother. I didn't know my mother even knew Mrs. Edgerly. Mrs. Edgerly is always favoring her son Leonard more than Connie, and that makes me mad.

It's probably because Mr. Edgerly burns Leonard with cigarettes to teach him lessons. If anyone besides me hates Mr. Edgerly, I bet it's my mother. My father, too. He'd deck Mr. Edgerly, and not because of Moxie. Mr. Edgerly wouldn't dare come near me. I'm surprised my mother lets me cash in bottles there anyway.

I haven't told Maggie and Eileen Keegan about the weird stuff at the Moxie factory because their parents hardly let them play with me as it is. I don't know if the Keegan parents know about the Cornelia thing. Anyway, grown ups may hate each other, but they all stick together.

So no one is going to help Connie, and she has no friends.

Slimy, disgusting, Mr. Edgerly. It's all his fault, not Connie's. He must hate her, and Leonard too, because Mr. Edgerly burned little circles all over him.

I know Mr. Edgerly is in a state of mortal sin. I mean, whatever he is doing is worse than eating meat on Friday, or not going to mass on Sunday. But he's too stupid to know it. I'm glad, because he's going to hell. I bet the devil can't wait to get him.

Sometimes I try to think of ways to rescue Cornelia. But I can't think of how. Besides, the police wouldn't believe me, cause I'm just a kid. How come nobody helps Connie and is mean to her? I hope she gets away as soon as she can escape.

Wonder how I know this stuff? I can't tell, I promised on my mother's soul.



Marlene T. Bell is a writer and a painter. She is an active member of the [National League of American Pen Women](#), [Cultural Center of Cape Cod](#), [Cotuit Center for the Arts](#) and the Morning Muse at the [Cape Cod Chat House](#). She is currently at work on her first novel in Nicola Burnell's [Stop Talking About Writing a Book – Just Write It!](#)

Primarily a self-taught painter, Marlene studied painting under Japanese Master Kaji Aso, among many others, but she prefers to work alone. She is currently a studio artist at Xanadu Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ.

Marlene has a degree in Anthropology and the Study of Religion and a Masters in the Creative Process as Manifested in Art. She was a member of the Cape Cod Writers Center and Falmouth Writer's Group.

Marlene, who lives in Osterville, welcomes your feedback on this story. "It's time to get this subject out of Pandora's Box of Evils and into the daylight." You can email Marlene your thoughts at [mtbellart@comcast.net](mailto:mtbellart@comcast.net)