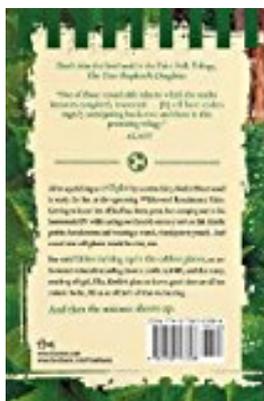


[PDF] Into The Wildewood (Faire Folk, Book 2)

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About the Author

Gillian Summers is the pseudonym for co-authors, Berta Platas (Georgia) and Michelle Roper (Georgia), both experienced writers in the romance and fantasy genres, respectively. But more importantly, both are ardent renaissance faire groupies. Visit them online at GillianSummers.com.

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CANOOGA SPRINGS, NEW YORK
WILDEWOOD RENAISSANCE FAIRE CAMPGROUND

Five days on the road with Dad, and Keelie Heartwood still didn't have a belly button ring. Her sort-of boyfriend Sean hadn't called her even once, and now she was stuck at another Ren Faire. Worse, her best friend from California would soon arrive to see her in all her misery.

A horn blatted in the rain outside, followed by raucous laughter from the Merry Men's cram-packed little party tent next door. She added a line to her journal about not being allowed to party with the other Rennies, and being confined to the camper.

Life sucks, Keelie wrote. She closed the book where she'd been documenting her pitiful existence, then leaned back in her cramped bunk and stared into space. It wasn't a long stare, because it was limited to the trailer's cozy eight-foot-by-six-foot. She'd been working hard at thinking "cozy" instead of "claustrophobic." It wasn't fair. She was stuck camping, but she'd heard that all the other elves, including the nasty elf girl Elia, were staying at some luxurious lodge in town down the road from the Faire. They had room service.

She barely had room.

Keelie was supposed to wait inside for her dad to return from his errand. It had been hours. She'd spent the time listening to the loud fun next door at the Wildewood Renaissance Festival's party headquarters.

If her friend Raven were here, they could join in the fun. But Raven had gone to Manhattan after the last Ren Faire, to work an internship at Doom Kitty, the famous Goth record company. It was a better gig than digging up herbs with her mother, Dad's old friend Janice the herb lady. Janice would be joining them soon, but Keelie really missed Raven. She was beautiful and confident, and treated Keelie like an equal rather than a fifteen-year-old tagalong.

The Wildewood's theme was Robin and his Merry Men, and Robin's partners in crime were singing (or what they optimistically considered singing) a rousing song that had something to do with married women and beer. Every chorus ended with a shout of "hey nonny!" They'd been at it for the past two hours, getting louder and more off-key by the minute.

Keelie sensed the trees stirring around her, and apparently they weren't happy with the concert either. She'd been able to sense them all her life, but it was only since she'd moved in with Dad that they'd actually talked to her and allowed her to see their spirit faces. The ancient oaks, larger than the trees in Colorado, pressed their energy around her now, wanting her to come out and open herself to them.

There were whispering birches and silent elms, too, and small cherries and rooping willows that liked to keep their roots wet by the banks of the river that flowed, deep and silent, at the edge of the Faire's campground. Sir Davey's Earth magic lessons had helped her block the trees most of the time, so that she wouldn't go crazy, but tonight she was tired, bored, and lonely, and she couldn't concentrate on the simple words her father's good friend had taught her. She had three more

lessons to get through, from the notebook he had left her, but she couldn't focus on them.

Keelie reached up and groped around on the little wooden shelf (cedar, from the north woods) built into her bunk. Her fingers closed over the smooth sides of the pink rose quartz she'd impulsively bought at the High Mountain Renaissance Faire. She held it in front of her, closed her eyes, and concentrated, trying to center herself. She inhaled and released her breath, then imagined that her feet were like tree roots seeking the dirt, grounding her. Her hands tingled, and there was a small ringing in her ears like tiny bells, which eased away most of the green tree-energy that surrounded her. The exercise would have been totally effective, but she was interrupted several times by shouts of "huzzah" from next door.

"Huzzah" was apparently the medieval equivalent of "You go," and the Merry Men made full use of the word. Keelie opened her eyes. The room was bathed in a pinkish glow.

Yes! She'd done it. She'd been working with Sir Davey for weeks to summon the crystal's protection. She couldn't wait to show him how far she'd come. She slumped back against the wall with a sigh. If only she could use the stone to send herself to the beach, or, for that matter, to bring her dad home from his errand.

Her father's ridiculous little homemade camper was fine for overnight stays, like the ones they'd had on their trip from the Faire in Colorado to here, the Wildewood Renaissance Festival in upstate New York. This Faire was the last stop in her dad's annual summer Tour de Ren Faires. He traveled to three a year, selling the beautiful and unique wood furniture that he made during the winter. When they finished here, they'd head for his winter home in Oregon.

She'd gotten over the embarrassment of people seeing her stepping out of the elaborately decorated little fairy-tale camper perched on the bed of the old pickup truck. But it was dollhouse-sized—too tiny for the three days they'd spent cooped up here while Dad set up his shop. She missed the spacious apartment of the High Mountain Renaissance Faire. She wistfully recalled their claw-foot bathtub and the tapestries depicting unicorns and flowers.

Outside, rain thrummed on the metal roof and the wooden sides of the camper, and against the tiny windows. Even the little cat door, unlatched now to let Knot in and out, creaked slightly. Raindrops pelted it as if tiny water soldiers were laying siege to the camper.

Keelie shuddered, remembering the water sprite she'd rescued in Colorado. That reminded her of the Red Cap, the destructive evil fairy she'd defeated. Not bad for a girl who until two months ago hadn't known she had magical abilities.

She checked her watch, a contraband object according to the rules of the Faire. Everything the visitors saw had to be in keeping with the theme: "...nonperiod items must be left in the staff living area so as not to distract from the period Ambience..." That's what the Players' Manual said.

What a joke. If that were true, then everyone over fifteen could forget about having teeth. She'd taken history; she knew what it had been like back then. The world of the Renaissance Faire was a fabulous fake. Fun, but not to be taken seriously, so she figured some rules were better ignored.

According to her forbidden timepiece, it was just after midnight. Zeke, her dad, had left at ten to see

Sir Davey and show him the way to the rock and gem shop's new location.

Sir Davey had just arrived in his mammoth Winnebago, and was parked in the motor home section of the campground. It would be great if they could stay in his RV. She'd have to sleep on the pull-out sofa, of course, but she'd heard that Davey's RV had a real bathroom in it. A hot shower sounded fabulous, not to mention going to the bathroom without crossing the entire campground. Maybe if she stayed in Sir Davey's "cavern on wheels" she'd sleep peacefully—without sensing trees and having magic tingle through her body.

Dad had promised Keelie her own room in their supposedly beautiful tent. She hadn't seen it yet, since it had been too wet to set it up. The tent was stashed in his shop, along with the furniture he'd shipped here to sell.

He was late. Maybe he'd gotten so busy that he'd forgotten her, or some tree had distracted him. Or worse, some woman. Dad was a babe magnet, and Keelie didn't want to share him with anyone now that she'd rediscovered him.

She needed to replace her destroyed cell phone. She didn't want to use Dad's, a small wooden rectangular box that he used to call other elves. The one time she'd tried to use it to call Sean at the Florida Ren Faire, she'd ended up telepathically linked to a spruce tree in Alberta, Canada.

After that, she tried talking Dad into buying her an iPhone. Mom had used a BlackBerry, which Dad might have been interested in because it sounded so natural and earthy, but none of her friends would be caught dead with one.

Mom. Keelie sniffled, wishing for lightning, thunder, some kind of weather drama. The plain old rain was making her maudlin, reminding her that her mother had only died three months ago. Not that she was over feeling sad; on the contrary, lately she'd been weeping over every little thing. She thought she'd gotten used to being without Mom, and to life without malls, friends from private school, tennis lessons, and the beach. Maybe she just needed to stay busy, to postpone the worst of her grief.

She missed Ariel, too. Keelie had bonded with the blind hawk that she had cared for in Colorado. Cameron, the birds-of-prey expert from the High Mountain Faire, had taken Ariel to a specialized rehab facility in Pennsylvania. No vet could help the bird. Ariel suffered from an elven curse, and so far no one had been able to break it.

Another loud "Hey nonny!" interrupted her thoughts. Keelie covered her ears to muffle the men's singing, but it was no use. They were bellowing so loud that the townies could probably hear it.

"I put her forthwith over my knee
And the naughty wench began to plea,
A little harder, master, pleeeaaaase..."

Keelie put her pillow over her head. It didn't sound likely that the Merry Men would get depressed and go to bed.

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