

Who's a Weed?

Mister! Mister!

Ralph took a few moments to locate the shrill voice.

Straightening a stiff back he thrust his fork into the potato patch

Mister! Mister!

The call was more insistent.

He could see her now. First her waving hand and arm. Now the mop of curls he had almost mistaken for a clump of marigolds down low against the fence. There was just a small enough gap in the greenery for the diminutive pink face to peer through.

Ralph had let ivy climb thick among the links of chain wire and he had planted clematis and pyracantha among it to keep out those local lads he called 'allotment weeds'. At one time the village allotments had become an attractive playground for youngsters who were able to climb fences.

'No respect for anything' he had commented following one particularly destructive rampage through his runner beans. *Not like the lads of my day. We were rough but we respected other people's property!* He had developed a degree of negativity about many things since being on his own and losing most of the things he loved most in life - except his garden and allotment.

It was a few years now since the lads had spoiled his runner bean crop. His response had been to encourage the allotment holders to put up high, secure fences to keep 'the weeds' out. Ralph, a good man at heart, had occasion now to regret his former attitude to the intruders. That was since Dave had taken over an allotment. Dave, a young disabled family man had adopted a different approach to some of the lads in the village. There were jobs he found it hard to do and he invited the boys to help him with heavier tasks on his new allotment plot.

When Ralph proudly said he thought of the boys as weeds Dave had reminded him some plants were only weeds because we didn't want them or understand

them. To the amazement of some others Dave soon had a young men's garden club on the allotments. He had invited other holders to get involved with the club, but fearfully or maybe embarrassed by his previous attitude, Ralph had declined. In the light of the club's success he was now wishing Dave would ask him again.

Mister!

Mister was not moving fast enough for little Lisa. He smiled at her - it wasn't really so hard to do it - *I'm coming.*

The sweet round face filled out into a gorgeous irresistible smile.

What is it my dear?

He had always loved little ones.

My teddy! It's my teddy!

There are words which are full of memories, some warm and cuddly like 'teddy', which pluck emotions from their hiding places.

My brother threw him over the fence and he won't come and ask for him back.

Ralph turned a full half circle scanning for a lost teddy bear. The brief search was without success.

You'd better come round to the gate. Wait for me there. I'll let you in and you can help me look for him. His mind skipped years. He laughed. *You could call him. Perhaps he'll know your voice!. Does he have a name?*

Just 'teddy' Lisa replied giving him a child's 'silly old man' look.

And what's your name?

I'm Lisa.

All right Lisa, let's start by the hedge shall we.

It was only minutes before Dave appeared. He was always inquisitive. The ladies of the allotments called it 'being nosey' but that was probably in a competitive spirit. He joined in the search but with no more profit than Ralph and Lisa.

I'll get the lads to help!.

Lisa was more relaxed with the boys whom she recognised as school friends of her brother. At last Simon saw teddy high up in a mass of ivy leaves. Lisa was excited. Poor teddy! *Save my teddy!*

How do we get him down? Dave asked.

I've a ladder in the shed, offered Ralph. *If you lads can come and get it.*

The boys were only too pleased to climb the ladder while the men kept it secure. Simon dropped teddy down. Ralph caught him and gave him to a very excited and grateful Lisa.

The boys went back with the ladder and Simon said he would take Lisa home as he was going that way.

They're good lads. Ralph said to Dave, as he helped him walk back to his plot.

Not weeds? Dave laughed, to Ralph's embarrassment. He added quickly. *You'll better get home now Lisa. Tell that brother of yours to be more kind and he's welcome to come here join us.*

Lisa left them and ran to Simon, clutching her poor persecuted teddy.

It was probably only half an hour later that Ralph was finished at the allotment. He was locking his shed when he heard the now familiar *Mister!* The pink-faced marigold was right behind him, clutching teddy in one hand and a long daisy chain in the other. *It's for you. I made it.* She held out the daisies. *To say thank you!*

Ralph was lost for words but Lisa wasn't..*Put it on then.* He bent down while she put teddy on the ground and carefully dropped the chain over his head.

Dave had not missed the event. Coming across the grass path he couldn't resist a word, *That's a lovely chain of weeds!*

Ralph had discovered Lisa lived not far from him in the village. They walked home together- each holding a teddy's paw between them and Ralph convinced that it really was time to offer to help with Dave's Garden Club.