

CHLORA'S SCARECROW SOWER COSTUME

Story excerpt from

CHLORA'S LITTLE GOODY BOOK OF THE MONTH: *November*

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Photography by Rice R. Jackson, III

** indicates links in the online version, to be released soon on www.gingergeyer.com)*

....a few days before Halloween, inventing a costume...

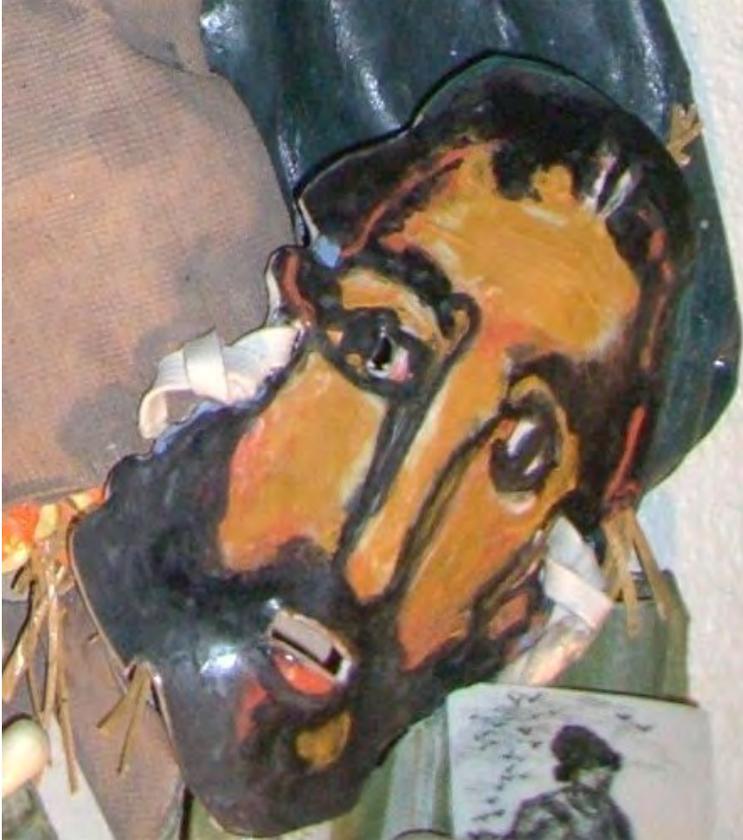
Time was running out; Chlora would have to use whatever she had on hand for a costume.

A clown suit would be easy. She quickly raked through her trunk of dress-up clothes and came up with plenty of clown-worthy accessories.

She recalled that artist [Rouault did lots of colorful clowns](#), so she found his book and snipped out the largest face in there.

With elastic tied on and the eyes cut out, it'd make a fine mask. It sort of looked like Jesus, but that was OK, since he was always in the middle of some three ring circus too.

*photo



[Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume](#)

Detail of mask; adaptation of Rouault's [Jesus Christ \(Passion\)](#)

A striped shirt, some old jeans, there! She was set.
Except she needed hair.
With no Bozo wig, a mop head would do. *
Does she or doesn't she? Chlora inquired as she
rummaged through the bathroom cabinet
for her Mother's red hair color rinse.
She squirted it on the mop, but it came out mousy brown.
That was better than pink, which sometimes happened to Mom.
However, the latex gloves from the dye kit were useful,
and they could later be made into more kitten boots.

She added a floppy straw hat to the mop; it looked fine.
Since the mop would not come off the stick,
she took the whole thing and stuck it down her back.
She looked like death warmed over,
or left-overs reheated for the third time.



[Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume](#) Detail of mop wig

As Chlora tried on her Dad's huge wingtip shoes,
her brother sauntered in with a corncob pipe,
singing I'm strong to the finish cause I eats me spinach! *
Chlora told him to quit mixing metaphors and motives.
He sneered and said she looked ugly as sin, like a scarecrow.

A scarecrow was not a bad idea.
A scarecrow didn't need these big clown shoes either,
so to avoid stumbling around she substituted her pink ballet shoes,
her only homage to the princess outfit.
These were her old beginner ballet shoes with the full soles.
She'd worn them out like in the story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses *
who snuck out at night to go to dance parties,
sort of like some Baptist friends of her sister.
Chlora now she had a fancier new pair of ballet slippers
with split soles but she didn't want to ruin them. *
Since the under-the-bleachers game about shoes,
Chlora was also a bit superstitious that split soles

might affect her spirituality.

She could end up like Salome with her seven veils,
in ballet slippers, twirling around
with the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

*



Full Sole/Split Sole

8" x 2" x 3"

2008 Glazed porcelain

Chlora was always losing those little pink slippers
and at the last recital she had to wear her sneakers instead.

Unlike all the little girls in their delicate shoes,
Chlora clomped around like a hippo from Fantasia
on the creaky wooden floor.

*

Truthfully, she'd prefer to take tap dancing lessons
and make some intentional noise.

She glued Coke bottle caps to the soles of her red Sunday shoes.

She tried them out one day after ballet class.

When she did the shuffle-ball-chain the taps scraped off.

*

Everybody wondered how the floors got so badly scratched.

UNICEF and FOOD PANTRY

Mom drove Chlora and her little siblings to the church
where they got their green UNICEF milk cartons
for coin collecting and a big fruit basket for canned goods.
Doing good deeds prior to gorging yourself

*

with candy helped counteract their upcoming gluttony,
and as soon as this canned compassion was over with
they could go full-greed ahead to the Halloween carnival.
They were all full of swag for their upcoming good deeds.

Chlora found a broken yardstick to put inside her shirt sleeves
to enhance her scarecrow look.

With the yardstick straddling her shoulders
and a mop up her back, there was no wiggle room in this outfit.
She would have to walk stiff as an Egyptian,
like Steve Martin on Saturday Night Live.

*



Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume

Detail of yardstick

She might not be as glamorous as Cleopatra
when she seduced King Tut but who cared?
King Tut was a hard-hearted Pharaoh
who flung plagues around,
while his grand Sphinx slouched in the desert
headed toward Bethlehem,
where the Schulammitte woman lay in wait
to give Cleopatra a run for her money.

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The knight and the leopard and the scarecrow
joined forces with other costumed friends

and set out in earnest, campaigning door to door,
like God himself was up for re-election.
Chlora lagged behind, her stiff arms
whacking into anybody within three feet of her.
She was as stilted as Frankenstein, and feared *
that what she had created might destroy her.
One of the other kids would ring the doorbell,
and nice ladies would feel sorry for Chlora and give her extra coins.
One woman said she looked like Pitiful Pearl. *
She offered her a burlap bag to sling over her shoulder, *
which helped a lot. Another lady asked if she'd come from Oz
with a new brain. One corny man announced that
she was outstanding in her field.
Then he grinned and encouraged her to keep watch over *
those second chance crops of autumn.
He stuffed a bit of dry grass
around her cuffs to make her look more scarecrow-ish.
Next to adorableness, pitifulness earned the most loot.

But other people were equal opportunity offenders,
slamming the door on scarecrows, angels and devils alike.
The face-to-face encounter was worse than being a telemarketer,
and Chlora was relieved to be wearing a mask.
She walked on the curb like on a balance beam,
her outstretched arms helping to steady her,
susceptible to the tipping point *
that would upset the balance between good and evil.

Her burlap bag jingled with coins.
Then they made a lucky strike.
Somebody had cleaned out their whole pantry
and filled their big basket with cans upon cans,
said they liked their can-do spirit.

Chlora was so happy she would've done the Moulin Rouge can-can, *
like Toulouse-Lautrec, if she didn't have a stick up her back. *
It took two kids to lug the creaky basket full of cans
and it began to break apart.
They should've brought the red wagon.

After all this posing, a hunger for authenticity set in.
Chlora resolved that when she grew up she would wear a uniform
instead of a costume. This would give her more of an identity,

and better yet, instant credibility.

.....skip forward to Halloween day and the carnival at Chlora's elementary school....

Halloween day finally arrived.

First up was the afternoon carnival at school for the younger children, carefully calculated to keep them off the streets. Chlora had to take her turn of duty by working in a booth. She looked forward to wearing a costume again. It would be like an artist practicing her eccentricity by dressing in some wild get-up.

Chlora had told her Grandmother to forget about the princess outfit as the scarecrow had a lot of life left in him.

Since she no longer needed to be the noble, raggedy peasant trick-or-treating for UNICEF, she'd come up with some revisions to the scarecrow. Crows get wise to scarecrows after awhile, and brazenly pull up sprouts right in front of them.

She'd take clues from those parables in the Bible, and turn the scarecrow into that judgmental sower who throws seed all over the ground.

This would be better than a benign security guard over the fields.

She'd mimic the bogeyman who sows weeds to sabotage good crops.

She could have a hay day with this, sowing seeds of doubt into all sorts of bad soil.

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Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume

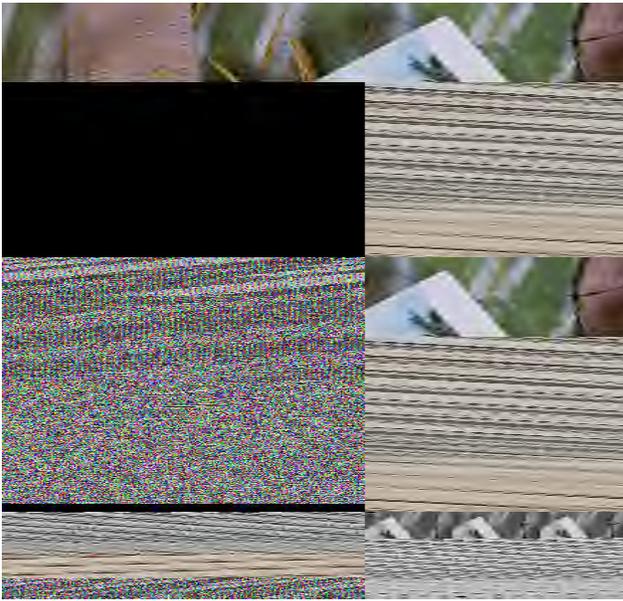
Detail of adaptation of Millet's lithograph, [The Sower](#)

The way she heard it, the sower was the boss
and the people were just dirt, dirt, dirt, all bad dirt
full of thorns or rocks or just trodden down.
Chlora would make it clear that SHE was the boss,
and tucked in several pictures of sowers
on her scarecrow costume to make the point clear.
As each kid came up to her booth with their cockeyed optimism,
Chlora would appoint one of the bad types of dirt
to their costume, according to its ingenuity.
She'd tell them to go find their own fertilizer or water or herbicides.
Growing things always required a lot of manure,
as church planters know.

*

Chlora had been assigned to the Go Fishing booth,
and she had a plan to hoard all the candy prizes for herself.
She put on her sower costume and the uncomfortable Jesus mask.
There is a problem with the vision thing when you're wearing a mask.
But all those little kids at the carnival would be scared,
their eyes as big as saucers when
she taunted them as Jesus the Judgmental Sower.
You reap what you sow! said Johnny Appleseed, somewhere
in the Bible.

*



[Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume](#)
Detail of adaptation of Pissarro's [Le Semeur a Montfoucault](#)

.....Later, after trick-or-treating, and finding her kitten had been killed, Chlora goes to bed crying.....

In her bedroom, Chlora slowly took off her costume,
reassembled it on the yardstick,
and hung it on the closet door.

The whole thing looked like a rumpled crucifixion.
Chlora shrugged and said, well go ahead and die for my sins
if you want to, but while you're at it, take away my wounds. *

She hugged her Teddy. She repeated to herself,
God is love, God is love, God is love,
while that other part of her said, where, where, where?
Where is Jesus? Did he go fishing again? *
God needs to put on some fur, some body parts, maybe a wet nose.

Chlora had always been proud of her ability to
doubt and believe at the same time,
but anger and forgiveness were just not good bedfellows.
She did not intend to get over this.
She was still furious and she saw red, and hatred spewed
out her nose. She mustered up every cuss word she'd ever heard
and applied them in new combinations to the mean boys.

She resorted to praying, but it bounced off
some steel door deep down inside
where Daffy Duck was railing at his enemies,
hollering out psalms of lament.
She got ready for bed, holding her head.
She had cried so hard that she ran out of salt.
Her brains were too big for her skull.
Mom gave her some orange Aspirin Gum
for her headache and tucked her in. Sleep tight.
After a long while the familiar fuzziness descended
and Chlora checked out.

*

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In the middle of the night Chlora was awakened
by a trickling sound below the closet door.
It was candy corn dribbling out of the burlap bag.
Then the whole scarecrow-sower outfit slipped off its cross
and softly drooped to the floor.
It puddled on the floor for a few seconds,
which seemed a bit off the wall, and before Chlora could check
it out, the costume gathered itself upright and stood.
It was an unembodied set of clothes as real as the nose on her face,
an ingathering of bits and pieces of hay with a few wisps sticking out.
The straw hat floated onto the mop head
while the scarecrow-sower twirled around and sang mishmash
of nursery rhymes, poems, and scripture:

Ring around the rosie, pockets full of posies
Ashes, ashes, we all fall down.

*



Detail from hat, rose brambles and adaptation of Rogier van der Weyden, [Descent from the Cross](#)

Chlora replied thanks a lot, ashes and dust to dust
don't make me feel better.

Love grows like bramble and rose, entwined *
If you love your enemies it'll freak them out

Chlora got a sip of water and another piece of Aspirin Gum
and put her pillow over her head.
The clicking noise got louder while the scarecrow
fully transformed into the sower
and began pacing around her bedroom.
His right arm arched over into the seed bag
and tossed the candy corn hither and yon in a constant rhythm.
Candy corn was landing on every available surface
and the bag replenished itself after each throw.
The sower kept up his singsong,

Thorns in the flesh are not pointless *
Get the tweezers

Chlora came out from under the pillow

and pointed out that candy corn is fake seed,
he wasn't making any sense, and there is too much
corn in the world anyhow, and the surplus is ruining the economy.
Whereupon the sower did a jaunty dance,
blabbered something about cavities
and that this candy corn turns into what is needed.
He strode right through the wall without missing a beat,
scattering seed all over the backyard,
down the road to the hard-baked schoolyard,
the briar patch, the gravel pit, all across town and country.
He was on a worldwide tour and Chlora was privy to it.

*



Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume

Detail, lying down with candy corn

It was gleefully absurd, lavish, and promiscuous,
like God spewing out his seed to populate the earth,
like the promise of St. Francis,
sowing love everywhere there was fear.
There was more seed being thrown than by the
Texas Highway Department, when it sowed wildflowers
along the roads in honor of that sweet but firm
First Lady who wisely told us to beautify America
during the ugly war.
But this sower didn't give a whit about the receptivity of the soil.
This love hurled itself toward old ladies in flowery underwear,
to cat murderers as well as to slum dog Jesuses in disguise.

*

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*With every hope there is a hurt
with every haunt there is a hero
Fear not*

*

If the seeds died well, they might sprout
and grow into a kingdom among us.

*



Chlora's Scarecrow/Sower Costume

Adaptations: Rogier van der Weyden's Descent from the Cross, Rouault's Jesus Christ (Passion), and lithograph, The Beautiful Task of Sowing Barren Land; van Gogh's Sower at Sunset, Pissarro's Le Semeur a Montfoucault, and Millet lithograph, The Sower

Installed: 60" x 24" x 10"

Hat: 5" x 13 ½" x 12 ½"

2008, glazed porcelain with gold

So what if crows ate the seeds, they were nourished
and later redistributed them in their droppings.

Perfect love casts out fear, we cast seed

*

Love is seed

Let it be

*

By the time the sowing cycle started over again
there in her very own room,
Chlora was mesmerized.

The sower sing-songed that

Jesus isn't just hanging around

waiting for you to get your act together

Grief TAKES time, takes it away, far away

Chlora looked around the room, expectantly.
The wound of an absence had not yet set in,
but Presence did right there on the bed.
A loving, almond shape hovered over her,
like a gentle mask of ether, the breath of the universe

*

ah yes, breathe me in

and exhale the fear

any of us is capable of great evil

but an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth

we'll all spend eternity in doctors' waiting rooms

with cheeks too numb to turn

*

choose non-violence

*

it doesn't mutilate any body parts

but requires them all

Chlora nodded off.

Next morning, she awoke feeling much better,
with candy corn under her pillow,
and gum stuck in her hair.

