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The HUGE Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine

by Dave Hawkins

Story Three THE RESCUE of NUFF-NUFF and HENSHAW

Sailing on clouds was a wonder for Lucy and Danny. Never had they been so high in the sky before; and as for the ship, it was much bigger than it looked in the comic, especially inside the wheelhouse where they were now. "Would you like to steer, Danny?" asked Captain Starlight.

"Oh, yes please," replied the boy. He hurried over to stand behind the steering-wheel, but it was clearly meant for people bigger than him. Danny was disappointed. "It's too wide. My arms aren't long enough to stretch across."

"Not a problem," said Colonel Moonshine. "Do the swapper thing, Starlight." They waited as Captain Starlight pulled a lever beside the wheel. The wooden floorboard it was fixed to began to turn, and as it did, the large wheel disappeared below the deck to be replaced by a much smaller one.

Danny was delighted. Now he was able to hold the wheel with no trouble, and he could turn it with ease. To prove this, he spun the wheel to the right. The ship suddenly tilted sharply which didn't bother Danny because he was holding onto the wheel; but the others were sent skidding sideways across the deck and ended up in a bunch against the wall. "Be careful!" growled Lucy, "You'll drown us if you do that again."

Danny turned the wheel to the left, slower this time and the ship settled. "You're just a sook," he said and gave his sister a big grin. "Anyway, we're sailing on clouds, so we can't drown – there's no water."

"No there isn't," agreed Moonshine, "But there may be later. A lot depends on our next adventure. Do you think that will be quite soon, Starlight?" When there was no answer, he looked around, but the Captain was no longer in the wheelhouse.

She was out on the main deck, looking through her spyglass into the distance. "Just keep her steady," said Colonel Moonshine to Danny as he rushed out to join Captain Starlight. "What do you see?" he asked.

"It's a bird," answered Starlight, "And I think it might be Beryl."

"Oh, I hope so," said Moonshine.

"Why is that?" asked Lucy who had also come out on deck.

"Because," answered the Colonel in a voice that was becoming quite excited, "She brings us messages; and sometimes they send us on adventures. Do you think that might be so, Starlight?"

The Captain was lowering her spyglass. "Possibly. It is definitely Beryl. She will be here shortly and then we will know."

It wasn't long before Beryl arrived. She looked a bit like a seagull, but one much larger than any Lucy had seen; so large, in fact, that as she hovered above them her wide wings blocked out the sun. With a flutter and some jerky flapping, she managed to land and perched on the roof of the wheelhouse. "What have you got for us?" asked Moonshine. Beryl said nothing, but her beak opened and the piece of paper it had been holding floated down. Captain Starlight caught it and began to read. Like Beryl, he didn't say anything either. All this silence was too much for the Colonel. "Come on, Starlight. Share the news. Is it about an adventure or not?"

"It certainly is, my friend."

"A huge one by any chance?" prompted Moonshine.

"I believe it might be the hugest one yet, Moonshine. This note is from Henshaw, Lord Nuff-Nuff's butler. It seems they are imprisoned in a tower and we are asked to set them free."

"At last!" declared the Colonel. "This is what we need after so long sitting doing nothing in Joshua's cardboard box. And if you are correct, a huger than huge adventure is just the job to show Lucy and Danny that we are more than just comic-book characters."

"They already know that," Starlight reminded him, "You don't have to tell them."

"I know they know," said Colonel Moonshine, "But that's the sort of thing comic-book characters say, even if we aren't any more." He frowned as he thought about what he had just said. "I meant that we aren't really comic-book characters... Well, we are, but we aren't." He shook his head from side to side. "Oh, I don't know what I'm saying anymore, I'm so excited. The four of us are going to set out on a huger than huge adventure. Isn't this going to be wonderful?"

While Starlight and Moonshine were off somewhere else in the ship, Lucy kept Danny company in the wheelhouse. He was still steering and was sure he was getting quite good at it. "Just stay on course and follow Beryl," she reminded her brother. "She will take us to the tower."

"What's a tower?" asked Danny.

"It's a very tall, skinny building," replied Lucy, "Maybe like the one in the fairy tale that the fair Princess had to be rescued from."

Very shortly, Beryl changed direction and dived into the clouds. Danny was about to do the same until he heard Captain Starlight's voice behind him. "No, Danny. Not yet – not until we know what's down there."

“And,” added Moonshine, “If there are soldiers guarding the tower, they might see us and try to stop us rescuing Lord Nuff-Nuff.”

“AND Henshaw,” Danny reminded him. “We have to rescue him too.”

“Of course we do,” said Starlight, “And we will, after I know what to expect. You just keep the ship steady for me. I’m going down.”

Neither Lucy nor Danny knew what she meant at first. They watched through the windows of the wheelhouse as Colonel Moonshine picked up a large bundle of wood and ropes off the deck; and as strange as it seemed, he lifted it onto the rail and tossed it over the side. Next, Captain Starlight climbed over the rail and began to disappear. Lucy just had to see what the Captain was doing. “Stay at the wheel, Danny.” She ordered, then hurried out. Once beside the rail and looking down it was obvious: the bundle that the Colonel had thrown over the side was a rope-ladder, and Captain Starlight was climbing down it into the cloud. It seemed a very long time before she climbed back up, and when she did, her face was serious. “The tower is right below us,” she explained, “But the rope-ladder isn’t long enough to reach it from where we are; and there are guards who will see us if we drop below the clouds. So, we will have to wait until dark.”

The wait for Danny and Lucy was hard; for Colonel Moonshine it was even harder because, when he was on an adventure, he wanted to get on and do things straight away. “Be patient a little longer,” Starlight told him. “And look.” She pointed at the sky. “The sun is setting. Once it has, we’ll go down.”

The moment Captain Starlight thought it was dark enough, she had Danny steer them down through the clouds and into the sky below. At first they could see nothing because it was so dark; but then there was just a glimmer of light. As they dropped closer, they could see it shining brighter from a small window near the top of a tall stone tower. “It IS like in the fairy tale,” said Lucy. “And I can see someone, or something. Maybe my eyes are playing tricks, but it’s nothing like a fair Princess, it looks more like a very big penguin.”

“That’s Henshaw,” said Colonel Moonshine, “And if our rescue works, you’ll be meeting him soon enough.”

The rescue, however, took longer than expected. Captain Starlight climbed down the rope-ladder to the tower, and the idea was quite simple – she would help Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw out of the window and onto the ladder. The problem was Lord Nuff-Nuff. He was too big and became stuck in the window. While Captain Starlight pulled him from the ladder, Henshaw was inside the tower pushing. Nuff-Nuff wasn’t too pleased and shouted: “I’m going to come apart if you carry on like this. And watch where you’re putting your hands, Henshaw – I’m not a sack of potatoes!”

“You could have fooled me,” said a muffled voice, “Just stop complaining; and keep quiet or the guards will hear. Do you want us to stay here forever?”

The arguments carried on between the two in whispers, even after Lord Nuff-Nuff had finally squeezed out onto the ladder and Henshaw was climbing up just behind him. They were still grumbling at each other when they were at last on the deck of the ship. Danny had handed over the steering to Captain Starlight and he was standing outside the wheelhouse with his sister listening. “You’d think they’d be thankful to be rescued,” said Lucy.

“I’m sure they are,” said Colonel Moonshine, “But they are always like this. If everything was as right as it could be, they’d still find something to argue about.”

“You’re supposed to be the servant, Henshaw,” snorted Nuff-Nuff, “But the way you bully me, I wonder sometimes.”

“I am not a mere servant!” replied Henshaw, “I am a Butler; and I deserve a lot more consideration than you give me.”

“There you go again,” said Nuff-Nuff, “Using those big words, trying to confuse me. It’s not good enough, Henshaw. If you’re not careful I’ll dismiss you and get myself a servant who won’t keep answering back!”

“That’s what you always say,” said Henshaw, “So go ahead and do it. See if I care...”

Lucy was sniggering, Danny too, and eventually Colonel Moonshine couldn’t help himself and started to laugh. “Isn’t this what huge adventures are all about?” he said. “I do love happy-ever-after endings.”

Lucy was still listening to Lord Nuff-Nuff arguing and commented: “I don’t know about happy, but it was a good adventure.”

“And,” added Colonel Moonshine, “Not really an ending, not yet. We still have to return them to their home which may not be easy. Someone captured them and took them to the tower. I have a feeling that whoever that was won’t be too keen to let them come back.” He paused to smile broadly, “And that, my brave new friends, will be another story and, I trust, another Huge adventure for Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine with Danny and Lucy.”