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The HUGE Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine

by Dave Hawkins

Story Four THE RETURN to GUMBYLAND

Before he had been captured and put in the tower, Nuff-Nuff was Lord of Gumbyland and that was where Starlight and Moonshine were taking him. “It was a nice place to live,” said Nuff-Nuff.

“For you maybe,” muttered Henshaw, “Because all you ever did was sit around drinking tea. I was the one who did all the work.”

Lucy tried to ignore the argument and asked: “What is it – a country, or an island?”

“A bit of both,” said Colonel Moonshine. “Gumbyland has lots of hills and trees and rivers, and the sun always seems to be shining. As Lord Nuff-Nuff said: it is a very nice place.”

“It always used to be,” grumbled Nuff-Nuff, “I just hope whoever took it from me hasn’t made a mess of it.”

“Who was that?” asked Danny.

“I don’t know for certain,” replied Nuff-Nuff, “But I think I have a pretty good idea.”

“And if it’s who I think you think it is,” added Henshaw, “We’ll have a hard job taking it back!”

Suddenly the ship stopped moving and Captain Starlight came out on deck. “We are almost there,” she told them, “But there’s a problem – the clouds are starting to disappear and if we stay up here in the sky we are bound to be seen. It will be safer if we go the rest of the way on the sea.”

The ship was lowered to the water below. “Man the capstan and set the sail, Moonshine,” commanded the Captain. The Colonel went to what looked like a large wooden cross resting sideways just above the deck. Holding onto one of the poles, he walked round in a circle, pushing the pole before him which made the cross turn. As it did, a sheet of cloth slowly unwrapped from the mast and filled with air as the wind blew into it. “Shall I bring down the balloons?” asked the Colonel.

“Best leave them for now,” replied Starlight, “If we strike a bit of trouble, we may need to go up in a hurry.”

It wasn't long before they were to discover what they were up against. Gumbyland was an island, a very big one; and as they came close and turned the ship to follow the coastline, Henshaw said: "The landing beach is just round the next corner. You should slow down and take care, Captain."

"There you go again, Henshaw," growled Lord Nuff-Nuff. "You seem to forget – you're only the butler; I'm the one who gives the orders."

Henshaw sighed. "Alright your smarty-Lordship, give them then!"

Nuff-Nuff took a deep breath, snorted and said: "You should slow down and take care, Captain."

"Brilliant!" said Henshaw, "Why didn't I think of that?"

Not that she would say so, but Captain Starlight had actually thought of it already. The ship was still moving, only just though. It crept closer and closer to a small cliff at the edge of the sea, but stopped short of passing it. "I ought to stay at the wheel in case we have to leave in a hurry," said Captain Starlight, "So I need someone to climb out onto the bowsprit and see what's round the corner."

Danny jumped up. "I'll go!" he said excitedly, then looked around the ship and frowned. "What's a bowsprit?"

Colonel Moonshine pointed. "That long pole sticking out from the front of the ship. Be careful. It might be slippery."

It was a little, as Danny found out while he was working his way along the bowsprit. Fortunately there were ropes that he could hold onto, and he was soon almost at the end of the pole. From there he was able to peep round the cliff and into the bay beyond. What he saw had him scuttling quickly back. Puffing and panting, he said: "We're in more than a BIT of trouble, Captain Starlight. There are three ships and lots of people on the beach."

Lord Nuff-Nuff hurried to join them. "Did any of the ships have a picture on the sails?"

Danny closed his eyes to think back. "There was one on the biggest ship. It looked like a mouth full of sharp teeth and it was sort-of smiling."

"SNEERING, more likely," growled Nuff-Nuff. "It's who I thought it might be - the one who captured me. The snarling mouth is the sign of Jokula, Prince of Darkmire!"

Captain Starlight decided that it would be best to stay out of sight and wait until night-time before they put her plan in motion. It was quite a risky one. The idea was to sneak into the bay, past the ships anchored there, then to sail up the beach and through the forest to Gumbyland Manor, which was where Lord Nuff-Nuff used to live.

"What's a Manor?" asked Danny.

"A big house," replied Lucy.

"A very GRAND house," added Nuff-Nuff proudly.

“And guess who has to clean it?” grumbled Henshaw.

Lucy was frowning. “I can see how we can sneak into the bay, but you said we would then sail through the forest. That sounds wrong to me – a ship can’t sail on land.”

Colonel Moonshine chuckled. “If our ship can sail on clouds, where can’t it sail?”

This might well have been true, except that another problem arose. While the rest of them were having a sleep, waiting for the right time to begin Captain Starlight’s plan, Henshaw was supposed to be standing guard, watching in case anything bad happened. Unfortunately, he too went to sleep and didn’t notice a number of rowing boats coming towards the ship from the bay. Henshaw awoke with a start as hands grabbed him and dragged him to his feet. Soldiers were running all over the ship and had soon captured Captain Starlight, Colonel Moonshine and Lord Nuff-Nuff. “Where are Lucy and Danny?” whispered Moonshine.

“In my cabin, I imagine” replied Starlight, also in a whisper, “I thought they would sleep better in there...”

She fell silent as the soldiers bundled the four of them to the middle of the deck, then began to tie them with ropes to the mast. “This is tight around my tummy,” complained Lord Nuff-Nuff.

“That’s because you eat too much,” said Henshaw.

“Will you two please stop arguing for a moment?” Starlight said sternly. “I need to think.”

She did, and they waited to learn what she would come up with to save the day. Moonshine was certain that she would because she always had in the past; but of all the huge adventures that they had been on together, this was surely the hugest, the most hardest, and quite possibly might be the very, very last one ever!

A soldier was coming towards them and looked to be in charge. Before he was too close to hear, Starlight whispered something to the others. “When I give the signal, we must shout as loud as we can, all of us together.”

The soldier reached them and said: “Well, now. I was expecting some fearsome warriors, but you look like a bunch of softies to me. Not that what I think matters. Prince Jokula will decide what happens to you; and I’m very glad not to be in your shoes.” The soldier turned away laughing, which made the other soldiers laugh too.

“Right,” said Starlight. “Ready... Now!”

The four of them shouted out: “Lucy and Danny, hold the pie and say the words, hold the pie and say the words!”

The two children were already awake. They had seen what was happening outside Starlight’s cabin and even though they were hiding under the bunk bed, they heard what their friends outside were shouting. “Have you still got the pie?” asked Danny

“Of course I have, replied Lucy. “What do you think I am – stupid?”

“Sometimes,” said her brother.

“Well, not right now,” declared Lucy. “Here’s the pie.” She waited. “Do you have hold of it?” As soon as Danny’s fingers were on the cookie, Lucy counted to three and together they both called out: “MOONBERRY PIE!”

The light happened again as it had before, and the sweet berry taste afterwards. Danny gazed around. “We’re back in my room.”

“Yes,” said Lucy, “And look at the comic picture. Captain Starlight, Colonel Moonshine, Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw are still tied to the ship’s mast and they are in big, BIG trouble!”

“And it’s our job to save them,” said Danny.

“We just have to,” said Lucy, “But I don’t know how yet.” She thought for a moment, then said: “Close the comic.”

“Why do that?” asked Danny.

“Because,” his sister explained, “It’s my belief that if we close it, everything will stay the same until we open it again. And that will only be when we have a plan.”

“A plan B,” corrected her brother, “Captain Starlight had a plan and it didn’t work, so ours has to be plan B.”

Lucy rolled her eyes. “Okay little brother – plan B it is. I just hope we can come up with it.”