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## The HUGE Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine

by Dave Hawkins

### Story Six TAKING BACK GUMBYLAND

After a very bumpy ride through the forest, Captain Starlight had found a place to hide the ship. From there, they walked to a group of trees that was quite close to Gumbyland Manor. “It IS a big house,” said Danny, “With lots of windows, so it must have lots of rooms.”

“Twenty-four to be precise,” said Henshaw, “And I have to clean them all by myself, thanks to a certain mean person who shall remain nameless.”

Lucy noticed Lord Nuff-Nuff’s mouth open, and she cut in before he could start another argument. “Never mind about that. First we have to get Prince Jokula and his soldiers out. There are so many of them, but only six of us.” She turned to Colonel Moonshine. “Is that what plan D is about?” Neither Moonshine nor Starlight answered and they looked a little troubled. “We do have a plan D, don’t we?”

“Well,” said the Captain, “Only as far as getting close to the Manor. The main aim is to capture Prince Jokula. Once we have him, the rest is simple; but he won’t give up as long as he has all his soldiers guarding him, so we have to put them out of action first. Unfortunately, we haven’t quite figured out how.” She looked at the others, mainly Lucy and Danny. “I am open to ideas.”

Following almost a minute of silence, Henshaw said: “I think I might have one.”

“NOW who’s the smarty-pants?” chirped in Nuff-Nuff with a snort.

“Be quiet!” growled Danny. “Let Henshaw speak. And don’t butt in.”

“One moment,” said Henshaw, and he shuffled into the trees to poke around in the grass. “Ah, here we are,” he said, pulling up what looked like a weed. He brought it to show the others. “This, my friends, is addlewort. Whoever eats it won’t be able to think properly: it will muddle the soldiers’ minds and make them very silly.”

“And I suppose you’re going to serve it up to them on a silver plate,” sneered Nuff-Nuff.

“Now that WOULD be silly,” said Henshaw, “No, their cook will be feeding them addlewort, and he won’t even know it.” He turned to face Danny. “The problem is that I need someone to

sneak into the Manor's kitchen, and the only way in without being seen is a small window. We are all too big. You are the only one who can climb through."

Captain Starlight put Henshaw in charge as they prepared the addlewort which had been gathered from the forest. After being tied to the mast, she had told everyone to bring a knife, just in case it happened again, so they were all able to help with the cutting of the plant. "Only the root," said Henshaw, "And make sure the pieces are very small – then it will cook quickly."

As she worked, Lucy kept stopping, and Moonshine asked her why. "It's about Danny," she replied. "I'm worried he might get caught."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," said the Colonel. "He's a clever boy; but just in case, let him take the pie with him. Then, if he is in danger, he can wish himself home instantly."

As soon as the addlewort had been chopped, Henshaw went round gathering the pieces into a bag. He came to Nuff-Nuff's pile which was much smaller than anyone else's. "Is that the best you can do?" groaned the butler.

"I'm a Lord," said Nuff-Nuff, "I'm not supposed to work. Think yourself lucky I did any at all."

Surprisingly, Henshaw made no comment. He just put the chopped root into the bag and handed it to Danny. "Come with me and I'll show you where the window is."

The two of them crept through the forest until the trees finished. "There's the window," Henshaw said in a whisper, pointing at a tiny opening in a wall close to the ground. "You know what you have to do?" Danny nodded. "And you've got the pie?" The boy pulled it from his pocket to show Henshaw. The butler took a deep breath. "Let's hope you don't have to use it. Now, off you go, and good luck."

From the edge of the trees to the house wasn't far, but because it was just grass, Danny had to crawl so that he wasn't seen. The window was indeed small and even HE had to squeeze through, but he managed. He found himself in a small room which, Henshaw had told him, was the pantry where the food was stored. Nobody was in there, but he could hear voices coming through the open door. Moving close, he peeped through to the kitchen beyond. Three people could be seen who were obviously not soldiers. They wore aprons and Danny guessed they were the kitchen staff. The one who was most likely the cook was stirring something in a large pot hanging by a chain over the fire. This would be the stew that the addlewort had to go in. The boy then had to wait for the staff to leave the kitchen, and he was beginning to think they never would. At long last the cook said to the others: "It's almost done. We've got ten minutes before we have to serve up. Let's go have a sit and a drink."

The moment they left, Danny scuttled across the kitchen to the fire. The stew in the pot looked and smelled awful which was as well – he didn't know what addlewort tasted like, but he

doubted it could make the stew worse than it already was. Emptying the contents of the bag into the pot, he gave it a quick stir with a wooden spoon, then hurried back into the pantry.

“Well done, Danny,” said Colonel Moonshine when the boy and the butler returned. “How long will it take to work, Henshaw?” he asked.

“Not long, I hope,” replied Nuff-Nuff’s butler. “A mouthful or two should do the trick. We’ll know quite soon, I think.”

Henshaw was right. In a matter of minutes, singing could be heard coming from the Manor House. The front door opened and some soldiers came stumbling out. They began leaping around, doing cartwheels, falling over, and all were giggling and laughing. Some others were apparently so confused that they couldn’t find the door and were climbing out of windows. Only one was not sharing the merriment; and by his clothing he was clearly not a soldier. “There he is,” growled Nuff-Nuff, “That’s Jokula. And he is definitely not a happy Prince, I’m glad to say.”

Prince Jokula was anything but happy. He was even more miserable after they had taken him prisoner. Herding the soldiers together, they tied them with ropes and led them all down to the beach. Henshaw was hoping that the addlewort wouldn’t wear off too soon because it was quite a walk; but there seemed no fear of that. They were all still as silly and began rolling around in the sand. “Look at them!” declared Jokula, “You tell me to sail back to Darkmire, but how can I with that bunch of idiots as my crew? I’ll be lucky if they don’t drown me rowing out to my ship!”

“Then I wish you luck,” said Lord Nuff-Nuff, “Because you ARE going. And don’t bother coming back!”

The next half hour was really funny. That was how long it took for the rowing boats to eventually reach Prince Jokula’s ship. They were going round in circles and bumping into each other. A few rowers dropped their oars and giggled as they watched them float away. Some boats managed to lose their way and kept returning to the beach. One had the Prince on board. “Have pity,” he pleaded. “Won’t you let me wait until my soldiers are back to normal?”

“We aren’t that stupid,” said Lucy.

“No we’re not,” added Starlight, “So just make the best of what we’ve given you.”

“And have a safe journey,” Nuff-Nuff called out.

“But not too safe,” shouted Henshaw, “And may it be a very long and troublesome one.”

Lord Nuff-Nuff smiled. “I’m speechless, Henshaw. For once we agree on something.”

They were all grateful once Prince Jokula’s ship had finally sailed away. While Lucy was helping Henshaw to prepare something special for tea, the others were all sitting at Lord Nuff-Nuff’s dining table. Danny put a hand in his pocket, fished out the cookie and put what remained of it on the mat in front of him. “It kind-of got a bit broken, probably when I was climbing through

the window. I guess this means we won't be able to go home. I don't mind at all – I could stay here forever; but Lucy's going to be mad."

Colonel Moonshine smiled. "No need to worry, Danny. We can soon make you another. Isn't that right, Starlight?"

"Better than that, Moonshine," said Captain Starlight. "We'll make two, one for each of them." She looked up as Henshaw entered. He was carrying something on a large silver plate. "Dinner is served," said Lucy as she followed after the butler. "We hope you like it."

Did they ever? It was delicious. "This is really yummy," said Danny. "I'm sure I've never had it before, but I know the taste somehow."

"I expect you do," said Starlight.

"The first time we came into comic-book world," Lucy reminded him. "It's what we could smell and taste when we were flying through the rainbow air. You are eating Moonberry Pie."

"Ssshhh!" Danny hissed. "We don't want to go home yet. At least not while there's still some pie left."

"It sounds as if you really like Moonberry Pie," said Colonel Moonshine.

"Oh yes," declared Danny. "Moonberry Pie is truly amazing."

"In fact," added Lucy, "It's so truly amazing that it is almost unbelievable."