



The HUGE Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine
by Dave Hawkins
Story Eight THE NICK OF TIME

It wasn't easy for Lucy to sneak out of home without being seen; and it was as well she managed, because she had Starlight and Moonshine with her. As for walking to her Granddad's house, she only hoped that the people in the street would imagine her two friends wearing military uniforms were going to a dress-up party.

Once they were safely in her Grandfather's kitchen, she placed the comics on the table, side by side. The draft copy, the old unfinished one, still showed Joshua and Danny in the room. The other that Starlight and Moonshine had come from apparently troubled the Colonel. "We're gone!" he said with a frown, "There's a picture of the ship, but we aren't on it!"

"Of course not," explained the Captain. "We're here, and we can't be in two places at once. Anyway, let's not worry about that. We have to get on with the plan."

Moonshine's frown deepened. "Do we actually have a plan; and if we do, which is it – A or B?"

Lucy sighed and cut in. "Of course we have a plan, Colonel Moonshine. That's why we're here, isn't it?"

Starlight, took a deep breath. "Now, do you have your pies?" She waited as they showed her that each was holding a small cookie. "Right," she said, "All together, say the words."

Lucy closed her eyes and called out with the others: "Moonberry Pie!" There had been a concern that this might not work; but she knew as soon as she caught the smell of sweet berries that they were flying through the rainbow sky. She was certain of it when she heard Danny's voice.

"See, Granddad," her brother said casually, "I told you Lucy would think of something."

"Yes," said Joshua, "I know I should have believed like I used to. It's good to see you again, Starlight and Moonshine."

"CAPTAIN Starlight and COLONEL Moonshine," Danny reminded him.

"Not yet, I'm afraid," corrected the old man. "You see, I've just realised where we are. I knew as soon as I saw this." He pointed to a sloping table in the middle of the room. "This is Monty Brown's drawing board."

“Who’s Monty Brown?” asked Lucy.

“He’s the artist who created the Starlight and Moonshine comics; and if you look at the drawings, you’ll notice they are the same as the draft copy in my collection.” Joshua paused to look around the room. “He must have been working on them just moments before Danny and I arrived.”

“How do you know that Granddad?” asked Danny, “And if you’re right, where’s Monty?”

His Grandfather began stroking his head the way he always did when he was thinking. “There’s a story I seem to remember that came with those first drawings – I bought them at an auction.”

“What’s an auction?” said Danny, interrupting.

“Never mind,” snapped Lucy, “Go on, Granddad. What was the story about? You obviously think it’s important.”

“Indeed it is,” replied Joshua. “It seems Monty was having trouble with the characters in his comic and what they looked like. According to the story, he stopped work and began roaming around his apartment, trying to get some inspiration.”

Danny butted in again: “What’s inspiration?”

“Ideas,” explained his Grandfather simply. “Anyway, as the story went, Monty was so deep in thought that he forgot the balcony was unsafe and that’s where...” Joshua’s eyes suddenly opened wide and he was rushing for the door. “Oh my word – he went out onto the balcony and it collapsed beneath him!”

The others followed the old man out of the room and Danny was saying: “That doesn’t sound so bad. We’ve got a balcony and I can jump off it easily.”

“This isn’t YOUR balcony, Danny,” Joshua called behind him as he headed for an open glass door in the far wall. “Monty lived in an apartment on the tenth floor!” As he reached the door, he spread his arms sideways to block the way past. “Don’t come any closer.” Leaning forward, he looked down. The balcony had collapsed, but hadn’t fallen to the ground yet. Tilted at an angle, it was still attached to the outside wall; and there was the body of a man wedged against the railing. “Monty,” Joshua called out. “Monty, are you alright?”

The figure lying on the balcony stirred and replied softly: “I have been better. I think I’ve broken my leg.”

The five friends huddled together in a group, trying to decide how to tackle the problem. “Someone has to climb down and help him up,” suggested Danny. “I could do it.”

“It’s too dangerous,” declared Starlight, “And, anyway, Monty can’t stand, and you aren’t strong enough to lift him. It will have to be me.”

Despite objections, Starlight had her way and was soon lowering herself carefully down onto the tilted balcony. It creaked and shifted each time she moved a little lower, but eventually she was crouching next to Monty. “We’ll have to take this very steadily,” she said to the injured artist. “Put your arm around my shoulder and I’ll help you to stand. Can you manage that?”

Monty glanced at his surroundings, then smiled weakly. “I guess so. I’ve got nothing better to do right at this moment.”

All was going well until Monty tried to put weight on his broken leg. With a cry of pain, he stumbled against Starlight who fell back onto the railing and disaster struck. With a loud, grinding crunch, the balcony floor swung down and just hung there flat against the wall. Lying on the railing, Starlight was able to look through to the street below. "It really is a very long way to fall, Monty. Whatever made you decide to live in a place so high?"

"I just did," replied the artist. "Now I'm wishing I'd given it more thought."

Starlight tried to sit up. As she did, the balcony shifted again and dropped a little more, so she settled and lay still.

Moonshine was peering down from above. "Are you alright, Starlight?"

"Silly question," Starlight murmured nervously, "And unless you can come up with Plan C quite soon, this balcony is going to give way altogether. Needless to say, Monty couldn't survive the fall; which means he won't be able to finish creating us."

"I don't understand," said Moonshine.

"At this point in time, Monty hasn't completed our comic; and if you don't save him so that he can, we will simply cease to exist. As for Joshua, Lucy and Danny, I dread to think what will happen to them. So, it's over to you my friend." The balcony groaned and dropped a bit more. "Better hurry, Moonshine. I have a sneaking suspicion that our time is running out, very quickly!"