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**STARLIGHT'S AND MOONSHINE'S  
HUGE PIRATE ADVENTURE  
Story One - The Raid on Gumbyland**



The school holidays had just begun and Joshua had invited his two grandchildren to stay at his house for the week. Like most children, Lucy and Danny usually found old people quite boring; but their grandfather was different. In fact, the three of them shared something pretty special. It was all to do with their belief in comic-book world, in particular the stories of The HUGE Adventures of Starlight and Moonshine. Unlike those who didn't believe; Lucy and Danny were able to wish themselves into the comic and become a part of the stories, as Joshua had when he was a child. Already they had been on a few HUGE adventures with their heroes, and they were hoping they were about to begin a new one when Joshua said: "I didn't mention this until now. I wanted it to be a surprise. I found some more Starlight and Moonshine comics."

The children's eyes flew wide, especially Danny's. "Can we see them now, Granddad?" he pleaded excitedly, "There must be some really HUGE adventures we can go on."

"Not so fast, young man," said Joshua, "We have to remember those times when things went wrong for us; and all because we rushed in without thinking."

"And," added Lucy, "The stories should be read in the proper order the way Monty Brown the artist drew them."

"You're right," admitted Danny, "We should stick to Monty's plan. Now, can we start on the first one? Let's see it, Granddad."

"Okay," said Joshua, taking a comic off the top of the pile on the kitchen table, "What have we got?" He paused to glance at the front cover. "Oh, my, this should be good – it's about Starlight's and Moonshine's HUGE Pirate Adventure." He opened the comic at the first page and slid it across the table to Lucy. "You're the reader, Lucy. Tell us what's happening."

Joshua and Danny moved their chairs so that they could look over Lucy's shoulder. Unable to read yet, Danny could only guess what was going on by the pictures. The first one showed Beryl the giant seagull perched on the side of Starlight's ship, and before Lucy could begin reading the words under it, Danny chirped in: "That's Beryl. What's she saying?"

"Nothing it seems," replied Lucy. "I don't know if she can even talk in people's language. Last time she brought a message it was written on a piece of paper she had in her beak."

"I remember," said Danny. "It was a message from Henshaw, Lord Nuff-Nuff's butler, saying that they had been locked in a tower by Jocula, Prince of Darkmire."

"Yes," said Lucy. "It was the very first adventure we went on with Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine to rescue them."

"A HUGE adventure, don't forget," Danny reminded her. "Colonel Moonshine always calls their adventures HUGE."

“And so they have been,” Lucy admitted, “Maybe we’re about to begin another HUGE one; but this time Beryl doesn’t have a piece of paper, so a lot depends on whether Captain Starlight can make any sense of her squawking.” Lucy pointed at the next picture. “Now she’s jumping up and down, flying off, coming back; then doing it all over again.”

Danny placed his hand on the comic and said: “Captain Starlight, I think Beryl wants you to follow her.”

Moonshine turned to look out of the comic at the two children. “Oh hello, Lucy and Danny; and hello, Joshua. We didn’t realise you were reading our comic.”

“If they weren’t, Moonshine,” Starlight said to her friend, “We wouldn’t be able to do anything. That’s the way it works – when Lucy and Danny read the comic, we come to life in comic-book world.”

“And we can join you,” added Danny excitedly. “All we have to do is hold it,” He pulled a cookie from his pocket to show everyone, “And call out: Moonberry P...”

“Not yet!” warned his sister, “Not until Captain Starlight says so.”

“Quite right,” said Starlight, “Whatever the problem is, it might be dangerous.”

“With any luck, HUGE as well,” put in Moonshine hopefully.

“We will have to wait and see,” said Starlight. “The way to find out is to take Danny’s advice and follow Beryl. Where she will lead us is anyone’s guess.”

“I have a sneaking suspicion about that,” said Lucy. “We’ll keep reading in case you need our help.”

Starlight’s ship had been sitting on the sea, but because Beryl was flying really fast, they would never be able to keep up with her. “Set the balloons, Moonshine,” she ordered, “We’ll have to go by air.” Moonshine turned a wooden wheel to do what he called the blow-up thing, and the balloons that were tied to and floating above the ship started to get bigger. In moments the ship began to rise off the water. As soon as it was high enough in the air, Starlight said: “Hold on tight, Moonshine: we’ll have to go very fast to catch up with Beryl.”

The two children and their grandfather watched as the pictures in the comic told the story of the journey, and Lucy began nodding. “I thought so,” she said. “It’s just as I guessed - Beryl has led them to Gumbyland. Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw must be in trouble again.”

Approaching Gumbyland’s shore, Moonshine turned back the blow-up wheel, letting the ship down onto the sea again so that they could sail into the harbour. It didn’t look good. Usually, there would be fishing boats anchored, but the only one there seemed to be sinking; and it was smoking as if there had been a fire on board. “You were right not to let Lucy and Danny come,” said Moonshine. “I sense danger.”

“I agree,” said Starlight, “And, judging by the smoking fishing boat, I don’t think it would be wise to leave our ship here. We’ll drive up to Nuff-Nuff’s manor house. Then,” she added, “If anything goes wrong, we can use the balloons to escape.”

To anyone who didn’t know, the plan would have sounded strange; but then, a ship that had balloons and could fly in the air might also have wheels enabling it to drive on land. Nearing the beach, the ship began to rise out of the water as the wheels underneath touched the sand. Next, it was rolling up the beach towards the track that led to Lord Nuff-Nuff’s house. “Aren’t you glad I came up with the idea of the wheels, Starlight?”

“Very glad,” she replied, “Now, keep an eye open. We don’t know what dangers lie ahead.”

Starlight halted the ship before coming too close to the house so that she could look around. “Very peculiar,” she commented, “There’s no-one to be seen. The place is deserted.”

“Not quite,” said Moonshine, pointing to a man who had just come scuttling out from behind a bush where he had been hiding. “It’s Dibbler, the gardener,” he said, “And he seems worried.”

Dibbler certainly was, and so too were Starlight and Moonshine when he told them that Gumbyland had been raided by pirates. "They ran up the road and into the house," he added breathlessly, "Then they came out carrying some sacks, but there was no sign of His Lordship or Henshaw. I was too scared to go in and look for them."

Starlight was thinking and said nothing for quite some time. Moonshine was becoming impatient. "Well," he said, "Do we go in?"

"I'm not sure," said Starlight, "There may still be some pirates in the house."

This was the last picture on the page the children were reading, so Danny flicked over to the next one. On seeing the first picture on the new page, he turned back to where Starlight and Moonshine were still outside with Dibbler. "It looks safe in the next picture, Captain Starlight," he said, "There's no sign of pirates. They must have all gone. Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw are in the kitchen."

"Are they alright?" asked Moonshine.

"As right as anyone can be," said Lucy, "Anyone, that is, who's been tied to a chair."

Rushing into the house, they found Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw exactly as the children had said – tied to chairs in the kitchen. Henshaw was complaining: "I told you Starlight and Moonshine would come; but, as usual, you wouldn't believe me."

"Why would I believe someone who let this happen?" grumbled Lord Nuff-Nuff. "You truly are a big, very stupid penguin."

"Penguin I may be," sneered Henshaw, "But I am also your butler and am supposed to look after you. Not that you deserve it, so I suppose I must be stupid."

While Starlight and Moonshine were untying them, Lucy asked: "What did happen, Lord Nuff-Nuff? What was in the bags the pirates took?"

"All of my money!" blustered Nuff-Nuff, and he turned to scowl at Henshaw, "Because my stupid penguin-of-a-butler told them where to find it!"

"What choice did I have?" pleaded Henshaw. "They threatened to take you out to sea and make you walk the plank. In hindsight, maybe I should have let them."

Nuff-Nuff frowned. "You wouldn't have done a mean thing like that, would you?"

"Now who's being stupid?" said Henshaw, "Imagine my life without you whingeing and carrying on all the time – it just wouldn't be the same."

"I'm glad you appreciate me," commented Nuff-Nuff casually, "But what are we going to do about getting my money back?"

Sometime later, Starlight and Moonshine set off out to sea in search of the pirates that had taken Lord Nuff-Nuff's money, but they had no idea which direction to take. Even flying high above the sea, all they saw below was the odd fishing boat, but no pirate ships. While following the story in the comic, Lucy and Danny had been talking. "I wonder if either Lord Nuff-Nuff or Henshaw might know where the pirates were going?" pondered Lucy.

"We could always ask them," suggested Danny.

"How can we do that?" Lucy puzzled, "They aren't on the ship. Captain Starlight left them in Gumbyland where it was safe. That part of the story has already happened. We can't go back to it."

"Sometimes, Lucy, you think like a grown-up," chided her younger brother. "You have to think and believe like a kid; like me. Of course we can go back. All we have to do is turn to the picture showing Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw waving goodbye as the ship set off." He found the picture he was talking about, placed his hand on it and said: "We have a question for you."

Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw looked out of the comic in surprise. "Shouldn't you be keeping an eye on Starlight and Moonshine?" said Henshaw, quite concerned.

"We were," explained Lucy, "But they can't seem to find the pirates, so we thought we'd ask if you knew where they were going."

"I do seem to recall one of them mentioning a place called by a funny name," said Nuff-Nuff.

"Candycane Cove," Henshaw reminded him, "It could be where the pirate hideout is. Tell Starlight. Being a sea Captain, she might know of it; but warn her to be extra careful. We don't want to lose her and Moonshine as well as our money."

"MY money," Nuff-Nuff reminded him.

"Whatever," said Henshaw.

"Thank you for the warning, Henshaw," said Lucy. "We'd better go and pass the message on to Captain Starlight."

When they went forward in the story, Starlight was at the wheel of her ship, while Moonshine was at the front looking through a spyglass down at an empty sea. "Still no sign of them Starlight," he called back to the wheelhouse.

This was when Lucy said: "Sorry we left you. We went back to ask Lord Nuff-Nuff and Henshaw if they had any idea where the pirates were heading. Henshaw mentioned a place called Candycane Cove. Have you heard of it?"

"I've heard of Candycane Island," said Starlight. "It's called that because the cliffs are coloured stripes like candy canes. The cove is probably where the pirates anchor their ships. Blow up the balloons, Moonshine," she commanded, "We need to make up some time; and," she added, "We don't really want to be on the sea when we catch up with the pirates."

"Why's that?" asked Danny.

"Because," explained Moonshine, "Their ships have cannons that could blow us out of the water."

"I don't like the sound of that," put in Lucy.

"We'll be fine," Starlight assured her, "The cannons only fire sideways; they can't shoot into the air. If we stay above them, the pirates can't touch us."

Being able to fly very fast, Captain Starlight's ship was soon approaching Candycane Island. Moonshine lowered the spyglass and called back: "I can see a ship still at sea just out from the cliffs; and I'd say it's sailing round to the other side of the island. Maybe that's where Candycane Cove is."

"Please be careful, Captain Starlight," said Lucy.

"Don't worry," said Starlight, "We'll be quite safe up here." She turned the wheel and headed straight for the pirate ship.

Joshua had been scratching his head, thinking. Suddenly, he realised what it was that was worrying him. "Captain Starlight," he said hastily, "You might want to hold back."

If she heard Joshua's warning, Starlight was too determined to catch up with the pirate, and her ship kept going. As Starlight came close, puffs of smoke began appearing above the deck of the pirate ship. "Now!" Joshua called out: "Turn round, Starlight, quickly! You're forgetting: the cannons can't touch you, but the pirates have pistols! They are already shooting at you – that's the puffs of smoke you can see. Once you come within range, you're in big trouble."

"Uh-oh," said Moonshine. "Too late." He was looking up at the balloons. Some of the shots from the pirates' pistols had already hit them. There was hissing as the air in the balloons began to escape. As it did, Starlight's ship dropped lower and lower. "Change course now, Starlight!" shouted Moonshine, "Yesterday would be even better. We're going down!"

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To be continued...

