

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Mine Casualties

Lillian had an uneasy feeling as she and Solomon headed down the roadway. She'd even expressed her concerns to Gladly. "Shouldn't we be waiting for the Coach and Stink?" She asked. Gladly dismissed her concerns with a cheery, "no, of course not! Why look they're right behind us!" She turned and looked and it appeared that Gladly was right. The Coach and Stink seemed to be following them on the road towards the mine. She'd completely forgotten about the unusual qualities of pixie dust. Just then Gladly shouted out, "look, it's Darwin!" Lillian turned back around and sure enough, Darwin seemed to be waving to her and Solomon from the entrance to the mine. Even Solomon shouted out, "hey Dar, you little weasel!" as he started to run towards the mine. All three of them crossed over the threshold and were quickly swallowed up by the darkness just past the entrance. Gladly quickly took on the lead. His weird jacket continued to emit a strange glow and up in the distant dark there were faint pin-pricks of shimmering light. "Darwin, are you there?" Lillian called out. "I'm going to get you, you little twerp," Solomon yelled. They'd made one last turn and were suddenly awash in light. It was blinding. Both Lillian and Solomon tried to use their arms to shield their eyes. The light slowly dimmed. Lillian and Solomon focused their eyes on their surroundings and realized they were trapped in a large cage. Gladly was no where to be seen.

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Martin gave a quick yank on the front door and in tumbled Coach Dribble and Stinknose Dewberry. They were both out of breath.

"Coach, Stink," said a somewhat shocked Martin, "are you okay? I'm so sorry for missing everyone at my office. I over slept. The clock is wrong. But something wonderful has happened".

Coach Dribble and Stinknose picked themselves up off the slate-tiled floor in the front foyer.

"Oh, Martin", wheezed the Coach, "something terrible has happened."

Martin helped Stinknose to his feet. He was burdened with a large knap-sack that had helped to topple him over.

"What, what's happened?" Martin helped Stinknose to stand and then removed the knap-sack. "Wait a minute, where are Lillian, Solomon and Gladly? Aren't they with you?"

"No," puffed Coach Dribble, finally catching his breath, "he's got them, all of them, and I've got my suspicions about Gladly right now".

"Perhaps I could elaborate on the morning's proceedings?" Stinknose Dewberry's

wind-chime-like voice made them both turn. "I did a bit of research in my Fairy and Pixies files on Mr. Yarble and Mr. Bolt and I think I might be able to shed some light on what seems to be transpiring. If it's alright with you Coach, why don't I explain to Martin what happened this morning after we met in front of his office?"

"Fine with me Stink, go for it," breathed the Coach, almost back to normal.

"Well, we waited a few minutes to see if you would show up and then Mr. Yarble suggested that maybe we could just leave you a note telling you that we'd gone on ahead. It seemed like a reasonable thing to do and I could tell that Lillian and Solomon were anxious to find their little brother. So we loaded the children's bicycles and their strange trailer contraption into the van."

"I borrowed the van from the recreation centre," volunteered the Coach.

"But how would you know where to find the old entrance to the Pruitt property? Said a puzzled Martin, "it was hard to find even when the mine was operating."

"We used your map," chimed Stink.

"What map? I didn't leave you a map. They're all sitting over there on the table, exactly where I left them last night when I got home."

"No, no, Martin you left a map for us by the door of your office."

"No Coach, I was going to give them to everyone this morning when we met at the office."

"Oh dear, this just confirms my worst suspicions."

"Suspicious, what suspicions Stink?"

"Let me finish telling you what happened this morning. I think it will help explain my concerns."

"Go for it," said the Coach.

"Yes, please continue," said Martin with concern in his voice.

"After we got the bikes loaded, we drove out of town and used the map to find the entrance. I was surprised that it wasn't very far past the town limits. Gladly suggested we take the bikes and trailer out of the van so the children could use them to come home with their little brother. Coach got the bikes out while the children grabbed their knapsacks. All three of them started down the mine road."

"And then just like that, they were gone!" Interrupted the Coach.

"How gone? Into the bush?"

"No," said Stink slowly, "I'm afraid fairy dust gone."

"I thought it was pixie dust?"

"Unfortunately, I think our Mr. Yarble has access to both."

"But, I don't get it," said a confused Martin, "Aren't they the same?"

"Oh dear. No. Not at all. Pixie dust makes you see what you want to see, fairy dust makes it appear that you've disappeared. I should have known when I saw the shimmer," Stink sighed a defeated sounding little sigh.

Martin scratched his head. "So let me get this right. Lillian and Solomon and Gladly started off down the road and the next thing you knew, you couldn't see them. But, if I understand you correctly, they were probably really there, but the fairy dust that Gladly used made it seem like they'd disappeared in front of your eyes. How am I doing?"

Stinknose and the Coach nodded their heads in vigorous approval.

"So instead of following them, or trying to find the mine, you came back here."

“Gladly took the map,” blurted out the Coach. “So we figured we’d better come and get you and get another copy.”

“But Coach, we don’t have the same map and Mr. Yarble,” said Martin, “may just lead us on a wild goose chase!” Martin sighed, defeated. “My first case and I’ve completely bungled it. How are we ever going to find those kids now?”

“Perhaps all is not lost,” Stink quietly volunteered. “You see, after I had my suspicions about Mr. Yarble, I put a bug on him.”

“A bug?”

“You mean like in spy movies where they attach it to cars or under tables and it looks like a dime or something?” Said the Coach excitedly.

“No, a tiger beetle actually. I slipped it into the pocket of his Pixie Coat of Shame and I can track it with this.” Stinknose pulled a small shiny device out of his pocket. It looked like an old-fashioned silver cigarette case. Stinknose flipped it open and to the Coach’s and Martin’s surprise it revealed a small screen, a tiny key-pad and a miniscule ear-piece, Stinknose size.

“This,” said an obviously proud Stink, “is my latest invention the Dewberry. It translates Fairese and Pixish and it has FDL and PDL built in.”

“I’ve heard of UPS for parcel delivery, so is that what they are, a delivery system?” Queried an obviously puzzled and non-technical Coach.

Stink giggled. “Well, I guess in a way it is a delivery system. FDL stands for Fairy Dust Locator and PDL is for Pixie Dust Locator. But best of all, all I have to do is type in the co-ordinates of what I’m searching for and if I have a bug in the area, it will pick it up.” Stinknose quickly tapped in some number and letters and before you could blink an eye, there was a faint green blip on the screen. “Now, I’ll overlay the map of those co-ordinates and viola! We know exactly where my little Tiger Beetle friend is!”

“Great,” said the Coach as he opened the door, “now let’s go get those kids back!”

“Just wait a second Coach,” cautioned Martin, “I think we should do some planning first. And Stink, what did you find out about Gladly Yarble and K.O. Bolt and what the heck is a Pixie Coat of Shame?”

The Coach closed the door. “Good point Martin, we need a plan.”

“So Stink, just who exactly are these two and what are they up to?”

Stink cleared his throat. It sounded like the tinkling of high treble piano keys. “Well first of all, the Pixie Coat of Shame, which is that ever-changing jacket that Gladly is wearing, denotes a Pixie who has completely stepped over every boundary of Pixie rules of conduct. No good Pixie wants to get a ‘pat’ and that stands for a reprimand from the Pixie Authority Tribunal. Being forced to wear the Pixie Coat of Shame is more like getting a knock-out punch from a heavy-weight boxer. It’s never given out lightly, but Gladly and his brothers are incorrigible.”

“But wait a minute, didn’t Lillian and Solomon tell us that his brothers had been entrapped by K.O. Bolt?”

“Ha!” Stink’s attempt at a snort came out more like a mouse fart. “Those two or three have been in cahoots with Bolt since the beginning! And furthermore, K.O. Bolt is no leprechaun, he’s short, that’s a fact, but he’s the brilliant, conniving, mean-spirited, revenge-seeking son of Kenwick Orville Bolt!”

The Coach gasped, not at what Stinknose Dewberry had just revealed, but at the

tall, slender figure that had just emerged from the kitchen. “Milly Boughtom, I’d know you anywhere! You are the spitting image of your mother, Leonora!”

Martin turned and smiled up at his sister. “Yes Coach, this is the wonderful thing that has happened. I know you knew Milly before she left Derry Dell. I’m not surprised you recognized her.” He turned to Stink. “And Mr. Dewberry, this is my sister Milly.”

Milly graciously leaned down, way down, and shook Stinknose’s hand. “Delighted to meet you Mr. Dewberry,” she smiled sweetly at him, obviously amused by this unusual, tiny person. She turned back to her brother.

“Martin, while I was waiting I heated up some of the buns from Mrs. Tingle’s shop that Mrs. Smitherwinky left in your fridge. I’m sure these two gentlemen would enjoy one with a cup of tea.”

“Brilliant idea!” Said the Coach, rubbing his hands together. The Coach was never one to pass up free food.

“That is most kind,” chimed Stink. He hadn’t been able to take his eyes off the lovely Milly. “I’d love a tun and some bea, I mean a bun and some tea!”

“Wonderful!” Said Milly as she turned and headed back to the kitchen trailed by the Coach and Stinknose Dewberry.

Mrs. Tingle had out-done herself once again. The cinnamon-strawberry swirl buns were delicious and there wasn’t one left by the time everyone had finished. They stood around the kitchen island sipping their tea. Stinknose was standing on a tall stool.

“So Milly, will you be staying in Derry Dell for long?” Coach Dribble always went for the direct approach.

Martin looked like he didn’t want to hear the answer to the question. He took a mouthful of tea, gulped it down and looked over at his sister. He blinked a couple of times.

“Well Coach Dribble, I was actually hoping to move back permanently.”

You could see the tension in Martin’s shoulders disappear and a huge grin covered his face.

“I’m hoping that my brother will let me stay here while I get myself established.” She turned and smiled at Martin.

“Oh Mil, this is your house too! You don’t have to ask!”

“Yes Martin, I do.”

“So what have you been up to all these years?” Coach Dribble interrupted. The ‘enquiring minds want to know’ was his usual approach. Tact and diplomacy weren’t in the Coach’s game book. He was licking his finger and picking up the last crumbs of the buns off the plate. “Everyone around here said you went to the big city.”

“I did and I think I was reasonably successful.”

“Gee, sis, I’m sorry I didn’t even think to ask about your life I got so caught up in what you were telling me earlier. What did you do when you left Derry Dell.”

Milly Boughtom proceeded to tell Martin, Coach Dribble and Stinknose about her life.

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“So Lil, what time is it?”

Lillian looked down at her brother who was stretched out on the dirt floor of the cage. “Solomon you asked me five minutes ago. Its 9:23 and I can’t actually believe that you are trying to sleep.”

“Well, what should I be doing?” Yawned Solomon, as he stretched and put his hands behind his head using his knapsack as a cushion from the hard ground. He then closed his eyes.

“How about figuring a way to get out of here!”

“Lil, have you looked around? There is no way out! And I thought you were the details person. We’ll just have to wait and see who wants what.”

“What do you mean, wait and see? And what’s happened to Gladly? He tricked us, didn’t he? He used his pixie dust to make us think we were seeing Darwin then he just disappeared.”

“Duh, Lil, remember he’s the Recruiter for the game. And this cage,” Solomon opened his eyes and looked around, “kind of looks like the holding cells in Gnomes and Trolls.”

“Holding cells, for what? And hold who to do what?”

“I dunno,” said a seemingly unconcerned Solomon. “I’d just managed to get to that part of the game when you came home.” Solomon closed his eyes. “So for now I’d suggest you just chill.”

Lillian was about to say something and then just shook her head in disbelief at her brother’s attitude. She sat quietly for a moment and then stood up and stretched. The cage, if you could really call it that, was about ten feet wide and one shoe-length shorter across. Lillian paced it out to find the approximate size. There were jail-like bars at opposite ends and the side walls looked like they’d been carved out of stone. As she looked closer at the much smoother walls behind the bars, she realized they were some kind of metal, possibly even steel. Then she noticed the groove above the smooth part of the wall. “Odd,” she thought, “it looks like something very heavy has scraped along there and created a deep groove, but what?” Lillian walked over to the corner of the cell where the metal bars met the rock. She stood on her tiptoes and put her hands against the rock to steady herself. She wanted to get a better look at the groove. “What on earth!” Lillian pulled her hands back from the rock surface; small flecks of grey and white were stuck to her hands. She looked back and forth from her hands to the rock and then slowly reached out her right index finger and with her finger nail, scratched at the rock. More flakes of grey peeled off and fluttered to the ground. Lillian scratched again and the surface underneath emitted a squeaking sound. Tiny white balls of material dropped at Lillian’s feet. “Styrofoam?” She took a step back and looked up and down the supposedly rock wall. She couldn’t believe it. The wall was indeed very cleverly carved and painted Styrofoam.

“Solomon these walls are made out of Styrofoam!”

“Uh-huh.”

“What do you mean, uh-huh? Doesn’t it concern you in the least that we’re trapped in some fake mine, that we have no idea where our brother is and that nobody else knows where we are?”

“Lil, cool your jets.” Solomon opened his eyes and leaned up on his elbow. “I’ve seen stuff like this on-line before. It’s like one of those fake charities ‘pay to get out of jail’ kind of things that mom and dad have done. You know, where they demand ransom money for the charity and they have to get a certain amount before they let you go? Except in this one guys pay points to battle in the next game, it’s all fake and everybody goes home happy.” Solomon rolled back over and closed his eyes.

“Ransom? You’re kidding right? And the only charity I’ve seen around here is the charity we’ve given to that pixie, elf, leprechaun or whatever he is, Gladly. And if it’s Styrofoam why can’t we just kick through these walls and escape?”

“Duh Lil ‘cause the walls are probably about two feet thick, just chill,” said Solomon in that ‘girls are so dumb’ tone of voice.

Neither Lillian nor Solomon heard or saw the heavy doors at the far end of their cell slide open. What made Lillian look up was the smell that wafted past her nose. “Yewh Solomon, did you...” Lillian slowly raised her head and followed her nose. What she saw left her speechless. She aggressively nudged Solomon’s shoulder with her foot.

“Hey, sis, lighten up!”

She nudged him again and Solomon finally sat up, rubbing his shoulder. He looked at his sister and then followed her gaze to the far end of the cell.

“Cool, dragon-dogs,” was all Solomon could say.