

CHAPTER TEN

Follow the Beetle

“Yikes, it’s a tough call Stink,” said Martin as he leaned over the small blinking dewberry device. “These tunnels are so close together at the end that I can’t really tell exactly which one we should follow. What do you think Coach?”

The Coach peered at the dewberry and then at the map, “well,” he said scratching his head, “we could always take the scientific approach.”

“You mean take the coordinates from the dewberry and from the map and statistically do the math to find out which is the likelier tunnel?”

“Uh, kind of,” said the Coach fishing around in his jacket pocket. “I meant flipping a coin.” He stuck out his hand; in it was a lint-covered quarter and a gum wrapper.

Martin and Stink looked at the Coach and then each other. “Works for me,” shrugged Martin. Stink nodded his head up and down.

“Okay, heads we got right, tails we go left.”

The Coach tossed the coin. The lint and the gum wrapper floated to the ground before the coin landed back in his hand. Coach then slapped his palm down on the back on his other hand. He lifted his hand to reveal their direction. “Tails it is. We’re going left.”

Stink picked up his dewberry, Martin folded up the maps and they all walked back to the van to get their gear.

**

Lillian and Solomon stared at the steel door of the cell, blinking in disbelief. A small tear had formed in Solomon's right eye and with his next blink, it tipped over his eye lashes and made it part way down his cheek before he quickly brushed it away. "Lil, I..." was all he could say before his sister burst into tears and leaning down, buried her face on his shoulder.

Solomon hugged his sister and winced slightly as she sobbed and sniffled into his left ear. He madly blinked back the tears in his own eyes. "We're going to get out of here Lil, really, I mean it. And if I know Darwin, he's already figured a way out. C'mon, let's sit down and plot something out." Solomon gently pushed his sister to the floor and sat down beside her, putting his arms around her shoulders. Lillian continued sniffing and snuffling taking short breaths in. Finally, like she always did when she cried, Lillian got the hiccups.

"Did you understand anything that K.O. Bolt told us Lil?"

"No, hic. I mean I knew about the hotel, hic, but I think that was in place before, hic, the mine even closed. I think that he, hic, has his own completely distorted view of the past, hic, and he kind of wants to keep it that way. He's not, hic, going to believe the truth. I don't think, hic, that he's a very happy kind of guy." Lillian rooted around in her knapsack for a tissue and not finding any, blew her nose on one of the paper napkins she'd stuffed in with their sandwiches.

"Yeah," said Solomon, removing his arm from his sister's shoulders and hugging his knees, "he's kind of a garden worm kind of guy."

"A what?"

"You know Lil, what I taunt Darwin with, "Nobody likes you, everybody hates

you, why don't you go to the garden and eat worms."

"Nice Solomon, I can see why he looks up to you."

"Hey, just doin' my job as an older brother and role model." He gave his sister a playful light shoulder check and grinned at her. Lillian managed a small smile. Her hiccups had stopped.

"You know Solomon; you are a pretty good role model for Darwin, despite all your flaws."

"Gee, thanks for the ringing endorsement Lil."

"No really, I mean it. You're a slob around the house and you never pull your own weight when it comes to doing any chores for mom and dad, but on the other hand, you're honest, fair and a good sport. Those things mean a lot."

Solomon sat contemplating. "Can I ask you something sis?"

"Uh oh," thought Lillian, "he has that serious look on his face. I hope this isn't a whopper of a question."

"Sure, fire away."

"Well, this has been kind of bugging me 'cause I figure I've missed something and I guess I've just never noticed it before..."

"What?" Said Lillian interrupting, "That girls like you? I know for a fact that Lilly-Sue Lampshire thinks you're really cute and so does Molly Flange."

"Huh?"

"I know I know Solomon, this whole 'girls' thing has you puzzled."

"Um Lil, I was going to ask you why I can't see Fairies or Pixies, I mean except for Gladly and Stink."

“Oh.”

“I mean did I ever see them? Are there really that many in Derry Dell? And how the heck could I help rescue them if I can’t see them? I’ve been bugged about it since we listened to Stink in Martin’s office.”

“Oh Solomon, I had no idea. Why didn’t you say something before?”

“Well, because I felt stupid, like I was missing something that I really should see. I mean does Darwin see them?”

“Yeah, I think he still does.”

“What do you mean by still does?”

“He’s not old enough yet to really stop believing in them, so they’re still visible to him, sometimes.”

“But did I ever see them?”

“Oh yes! When you were young you’d be out in the garden looking for ‘Lairies’! That’s what you called them. I thought it was hysterical and mom thought you had an imaginary friend.”

“And there were lots?”

“Yep, like Stink said, garden Fairies, flower Fairies, a whole bunch. But once they sense that you don’t really believe in them anymore then it’s almost impossible to see them. It’s kind of like trying to see a firefly in the daytime. I also think the Fairies that K.O. Bolt has trapped here would be more than willing to let you see them, especially if we’re here to rescue them.”

Solomon nodded his head and seemed reassured. “But what about Pixies?”

“Well, you saw what Gladly did with his Pixie dust, so you’ve probably seen lots

of Pixies all around Derry Dell, just didn't know it."

Lillian thought for a moment. "Actually you know two Pixies really well!"

"I do?"

"Yes, I'd almost forgotten! Flora Green and Ludmilla Tingle!"

Solomon shook his head. "Lil, they're not Pixies."

"Oh yes they are! Both of them use Pixie dust above their doorways so that their customers see what they want to see. Regular Derry Dellians see Flora and Ludmilla as one of them. The local Pixies see them as Pixies and here's the beautiful twist; the Derry Dellians see the Pixies as other Derry Dellians and it's the reverse for the Pixies – they see other Pixies!"

"But why Lil, wouldn't everyone get along even if they saw a person or a Pixie?"

"Of course, but they're thinking of their customers, so they've created an environment so they feel comfortable. Besides, before they started dusting their doors a couple of Pixies got bowled over accidentally. And you know they're warm, funny and friendly, no matter which way you see them or they see you."

"Huh, I never knew."

"And that Solomon is one of your flaws, you never read! If you ever got your eyes peeled away from your stupid computer and read a book or two you'd find out amazing things about where you live."

"Or used to live," Solomon sighed.

"You're right," Lillian said dejectedly. "If we don't figure a way out of here it sounds like we'll end up as lawn ornaments half-way around the world."

They both sat hugging their knees and staring at the floor. Neither one of them

noticed the steel cell door slide open a few inches. Nor did they notice Gladly Yarble ease himself into the cell through the small opening.

Lillian looked up first. “You!”

Gladly frantically waved his hands in a ‘be quiet’ gesture, but before he could get much further into the cell, Solomon had leapt to his feet, charged at Gladly and picked him up rather roughly by his shoulders. Lillian was surprised at her brother’s speed and strength.

“Alright, Yarble-mouth, where is our brother?” Solomon gave Gladly a small shake.

“Solomon, don’t hurt him!” Lillian got to her feet and hurried towards Solomon and Gladly.

“Yes, please don’t hurt me,” said Gladly, meekly. “I know where your brother is and I think I can lead you to him.”

“You’d better,” growled Solomon, trying to sound tough.

“Okay, Solomon, I think you can let Mr. Yarble down. But you owe us an explanation, don’t you Gladly?”

Gladly sighed, “yes, yes I do. This happens every time.”

Solomon lowered Gladly to the floor. “What happens every time?”

“I get tricked by K.O. Bolt, that’s what happens.”

“Really?” Lillian said, unconvinced. “And what exactly happens every time?”

“He gives me pixie dust and fairy dust and he promises me more and he promises me my brothers, and I guess I just get trapped again...” Gladly’s voice trailed away.

“Ya, well you’ve tricked us and made promises,” Solomon said angrily.

“Why don’t you tell us what is going on,” Lillian said firmly. She took Gladly by the arm and lead him to the back on the cell where their backpacks were. “Are you hungry? Would you like a Crunchy Chew?”

Gladly nodded; a defeated nod. He seemed to have shrunk in his coat. He took the Crunchy Chew from Lillian and sat down. Lillian noticed that his coat, once vibrant and colourful was now a lifeless sooty grey. He wolfed down the candy bar in two bites and then proceeded to lick each one of his fingers for the tiniest morsel more.

“So,” said Lillian, sitting down beside Gladly, “perhaps you’re ready to tell us a few things, like maybe the truth? Then you can, no, you will lead us to Darwin.”

**

Martin, the Coach and Stink hauled their gear out of the back of the van. Coach had cobbled together some equipment from the centre. He’d taken some carabiners, a belt and rope that the kids used for rock climbing and he borrowed a helmet with a head-lamp that was used for exploring caves. Coach put the helmet on and clicked the belt around his waist. The rope and carabiners dangled down the side of his leg. He already had on the borrowed pair of hiking shoes and he had Darwin’s flashlight. Martin’s knapsack had his gear for walking in it. He pulled out walking shoes, a wool pair of socks, a red, light water-proof jacket, a tweed hat and a powerful flashlight. He proceeded to change his shoes and socks and then stuffed his pant-legs into the top of the wooly socks. Martin jammed the hat down over his ears and put on the red jacket. Stink yanked a long yellow scarf out of his small bag and wrapped it around his neck a few times, covering the top part of his burgundy velvet jacket. He put on a black visor that had two tiny lights secured on either side. Stink held his dewberry in one hand. It continued to blip.

“Let’s put the water bottles and snacks in my knapsack,” said Martin as he slipped his arm through one shoulder strap and then the other.

The Coach zipped open the back of the knapsack and filled it with three water bottles and two handfuls of snack bars and a couple of oranges. “There ya go,” he said as he zipped the sack shut, “I think we’re ready.”

Martin took a deep breath. “Okay, let’s go get those kids.”

Martin lead off, with the Coach and Stink following. To any observer they would have looked like the most unlikely rescue team possible. Martin looked like he might be a contestant in a ‘village idiot’ contest. Coach resembled some sort of kiosk that you’d put in a roadway to divert traffic and Stink, with his black visor and bug-eye like lights could have passed for an exotic beetle. They paused momentarily at the entrance to the mine, then stepped forward and were quickly swallowed by the darkness. Neither Martin, Coach, nor Stink noticed the small camera above the entrance that pivoted and tracked their progress into the mine.

**

“Yeah, I’d like a few things sorted out too, like where did you disappear to and how did you manage to get back here without Bolt or the dragon-dogs seeing you?” Solomon stood over Gladly, glaring down at him.

“Well, I, uhm, I noticed a hidden passage part way down the mine. It’s probably an old ventilation shaft. I thought maybe it would lead somewhere, so I followed it for just a few meters and then came out, but by then you were gone.”

“But you would have known where we were. There’s only one way you can go at that point.”

“Not really.”

“Oh come on Gladly,” Solomon rolled his eyes, “are you telling me that this Bolt guy can just make a mine tunnel disappear?”

“Sort of, there are a couple of tunnels into the mine but one will always look like it’s blocked off when you get to the end but the other one will be open. K.O. Bolt can make sure you don’t have access by blocking off which ever one he chooses.”

“But how can you block off one of the mine tunnels so quickly?”

“See those marks?” Gladly pointed up to the deep grooves in the stone at the back of the cell. “They’ve been made to accommodate the tracks that move this entire middle part around. All he has to do is to swing the hub around and it closes off access to one of the tunnels.”

Lillian stood up and looked more closely at the grooves. “So you’re saying that we’re in a cell that sort of sits on a wheel that rotates around some kind of centre and there are two access points from the tunnels, but one is always blocked, or both could be depending on where the wheel is in its rotation?”

Gladly nodded, Solomon looked completely puzzled.

“Whoa, sis, could you say that in words that I can understand?”

“Well, if I’ve got this right, it appears that Mr. Bolt has built a series of cells in a circle. The back entrance of the cell can open into one of the two tunnels and you can get out, if it’s rotated that way. The rest of the time he has access from the front.” Lillian paused. “He must have taken years to build this.”

“Oh indeed he did, about ten actually,” volunteered Gladly.

“Amazing, it’s quite an engineering marvel.”

Solomon looked perplexed, like he was trying to figure something out. He finally turned to Lillian. “Lil, don’t you remember what Gladly told us yesterday about his brothers disappearing and how old he was?”

“Yes, but what does that have to do with anything right now?”

“Think about it for a minute. How old does this Bolt jerk look to you? Early thirties, maybe?”

“Ya, so?”

“Look at him,” said Solomon, pointing at Gladly. “How old does he look?” Seventeen? Late teens? And yet he told us that his brothers were maybe kidnapped a few years ago.” Solomon stormed over to Gladly and picked him up by his jacket shoulders.

“Okay buster, that’s it, you’re a bald-faced liar. You better give us the truth, right now and I want to see Darwin, right now.”

“Solomon,” shrieked a shocked Lillian. “Please put him down, violence won’t solve anything!”

Solomon unceremoniously dropped Gladly back onto the floor of the cell.

Lillian sat back down beside Gladly. “I think you’d better tell us the truth Gladly, now.”

Gladly actually looked shaken. “I’ve been trying to, sort of. But first of all you should know that Pixies only age one year for seven human years, that’s why I look young. It’s sort of like being Peter Pan, forever. That’s why Pixies never seem to grow up. I guess it has its advantages, but it’s kind of a curse too.”

“I’m happy you’ve explained that Gladly, but right now we just want to know what’s going on with this Bolt guy and how we can get our brother back and by the

sounds of it the Flatchett boys too.”

“Okay. Some of what I told you is true. My parents did just vanish. I think, well, most Pixies think Bolt has something to do with that too. He needed workers to build all this. But my brothers, they kind of went on their own. They thought it would be fun but when they realized that they could never get out it was too late. He’s got a lot of other Pixies that have suffered the same fate.”

“But why Pixies,” said an obviously puzzled Lillian.

“I guess in a way it’s a revenge thing for his mother.”

“You mean Felicity? But why? And what on earth has he got against the Corrigans?”

“Let me deal with your family first. He thinks that your relatives helped to cause the death of his father. Bolt’s father continued to try and run the mine after the investors backed out. He did everything by himself. One day he was working with one of the mine carts and it accidentally backed up and pinned him against the wall of the mine. He died a few hours later.”

“Oh that’s horrible,” gasped Lillian. “I had no idea but how does our family fit in?”

“It’s not just your family; it’s the whole of Derry Dell. K.O. blames everyone for the death of his father, thinks the whole town was against him; the Flatchetts because of their mineral knowledge, the Nitlints because they pulled their money out, like I said, the whole town. And because Felicity had already left the family by that point, it left him an orphan.”

“But why did Felicity leave and why would she leave her son? That doesn’t seem

very, uh, motherly,” added Solomon.

“Because of Leonora Boughtom.”

“Bolt mentioned her in his rant, but I don’t get it.”

“Leonora Boughtom had a son with K.O. Bolt senior.”

“But how?” asked a very puzzled Lillian.

“Whoa, sis! I guess I’ll have to give you a lesson in the birds and the bees,”

chortled Solomon.

“Oh Solomon,” tsked Lillian, “that’s not what I meant. I did some research for an essay on the local history and believe me; the Boughtom’s wanted nothing to do with K.O. Bolt.”

“You’re right,” said Gladly, “they didn’t nor did Leonora that’s why he used Pixie dust. K.O. Bolt tricked Leonora into believing that he was her wandering husband and once Felicity found out that not only was her husband cheating but that Leonora had had a son by him, she left.”

Neither Lillian nor Solomon spoke a word. Lillian looked stunned. Solomon still looked like he was trying to connect the dots. Finally Lillian said, “But that means…”

“Yes it does,” nodded Gladly.

“Means what?” Solomon was perplexed.

“It means,” said Lillian, turning to her brother, “that Martin Boughtom is K.O. Bolt’s younger half-brother.”

“That’s impossible,” said Solomon shaking his head, “Martins’ nice and he’s not a Leprechaun.”

“Neither is or was K.O. Bolt. Both father and son are, or were, mean-spirited,

selfish, ego-maniacs who only see the world the way they want to see it. I only told you the crazy story about pots of gold and stuff because that's what K.O. told me. It took me a while to figure things out but basically he just wants revenge, he wants the Fairies fairy dust and the Pixies pixie dust so he can cause havoc where ever he goes."

"So why are you telling us all this," Lillian said slowly.

"Because guess who is on his way here to supposedly rescue you?"

"The Coach, Stink and Martin...but you don't think..." Solomon didn't finish his thoughts.

"All I know is that 'blood is thicker than water', so the old saying goes and look at the lengths I've gone to to get my brothers back."

Lillian gasped. "That explains why they just drove off this morning after we started towards the mine!"

"And don't forget he didn't show up this morning but there was a map at the door of his office," added Gladly.

"How do you know that Martin and the rest of them are on their way here?"

Solomon asked, somewhat suspiciously.

"Because," said Gladly, "I saw one of the monitors that K.O. keeps around for security and they were at the entrance of the mine about five minutes ago."

"Great, just great," said Solomon. He and Lillian stared glumly at the floor.

"Wait a minute," Lillian said excitedly, "can't we use some of your Pixie and Fairy dust to help us get out of here?"

"Nope," said Gladly, rummaging around in Lillian's knapsack for something else to eat.

“Why not?” Demanded Solomon, “you said you were going to help us.”

“Because I don’t have any of either; K.O. Bolt won’t give me any and that’s why my Pixie jacket is so dull.”

“So we’re doomed.”

“I didn’t say that. I just said I don’t have any dust.” Gladly had found the last Crunchy Chew and was devouring it. “But I think we might be able to sneak out of here before your so-called rescue team shows up.”

“But how, and won’t K.O. or the dogs catch us?”

“I don’t think so. Right now K.O. is up at the old Pruitt house with the dogs and he won’t be back for a while.”

“The old Pruitt house, how do you know that?” Lillian asked.

“Because it’s right above us. He has an elevator that takes him up and he’s trying to figure out his Fairy dust and Pixie dust problem.”

“Why does he have a problem?” Lillian was now very curious.

“He has too much Pixie dust and not enough Fairy dust. He wants Pixies to leave, but he needs to keep the Fairies to get more dust. Look, it would be easier just to show you.”

“But how can we get out?”

“I got in didn’t I? I’ve got the codes for all the doors. Just push this door open a bit more and we can all get out.”

Lillian and Solomon looked at each other and then raced over to the door. Sure enough, all they had to do was give it a good yank and there was plenty of room for them to squeeze through and into the passage that lead to the other cells. Gladly slowly got to

his feet and sauntered after the Corrigan children.