

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Everyone Gets Caught

“Do you have any idea where we are?” Martin wheezed as he trailed behind the Coach and Stink.

“Yes, yes absolutely!” Stink chimed as he flitted along the mine tunnel. His blinking Dewberry device was held out in front of him. “And we’re getting very close to my little beetle friend.”

“Good, maybe we could stop just up ahead and grab some water; it’s really warm in here.” The Coach slowed to take off his sweat-suit jacket and tie it around his waist. Underneath he had on a Budgie Hammers t-shirt. The t-shirt featured the bodies of budgies with various types of hammers – sledge hammers, tack hammers, and regular hammers - as their heads. The budgies were striking typical rock-band poses.

“I had no idea you were a fan,” Martin said, smiling, obviously amused, as he caught up to the Coach.

“Yeah, I’ve known Din for years. This t-shirt was from their last road show.” The Coach was obviously proud of his piece of rock and roll memorabilia.

“Darn. Fairy feathers and Pixie pits!” Stink tinkled. He was further ahead in the tunnel than the Coach and Martin.

“What? What is it?” Said Martin and the Coach in unison as they hustled up to where Stink was standing.

“Pardon my language, but look!”

Facing them was a seamless wall of rock. There was simply no more tunnel; they'd come to a dead-end.

"I guess we took the wrong tunnel," said Martin as he stood and looked at the wall of rock.

"But my Dewberry device is still blinking and look," Stink said as he showed it to them both, "this says we are within twelve meters of my beetle. I don't get it!"

"Well, we need a water and snack break anyway. Martin let me get some stuff out of the knapsack."

"Sure guys, here you go." Martin slid the knapsack off his back and plopped it at the Coach's feet. "I'm just going to back track a bit. I think I saw a ventilation shaft back a few meters." Martin took off his hat and let it flop down beside the knapsack. He stretched and then, flashlight in hand, sauntered back down the tunnel.

"Darn technical devices," groused Stink as he pushed the buttons on the Dewberry.

"Yep, that's why I don't own a computer," said the Coach through a mouthful of snack bar.

Martin found the ventilation shaft. It was quite narrow but he managed to squeeze down it a few meters. The light from his flashlight flickered on the walls and then reflected off something metal further down. "Ah ha," he thought, "just what I expected." He side-stepped out of the shaft and hurried back to tell the Coach and Stink what he'd found. Martin slowed down as he got closer to the rock wall. The only thing the bright light from his flashlight picked up was his hat lying on the ground where he'd left it. His knapsack was gone and so were Stink and the Coach.

Martin blinked in disbelief. “That’s impossible,” he thought. He swung the flashlight up over the rock wall. It still looked immovable. He panned the light down to the tunnel floor and crouched down. As he looked closer, he could see what appeared to be drag-tracks on the ground. Martin slowly moved the light along the tracks. They lead right up to the rock wall and then stopped. He stood up and began pounding on it. “Coach, Stink,” he yelled. A small echo reverberated back down the tunnel and then it was quiet again. Martin slid to the ground beside the wall.

“Great. No water, no food, no maps. Well, I guess it’s time for plan B,” he said out loud to obviously no-one. He sat for a moment and then stood up and headed back towards the ventilation shaft.

Martin once again squeezed himself along the narrow opening. The light from his flashlight danced on the walls ahead of him. The shaft was on a slight downward incline and Martin could feel the footing becoming more and more slippery; even his hiking shoes weren’t providing much of a grip. Suddenly, the incline became even steeper. Martin scrambled to keep his footing, but to no avail. He fell backwards and started to slide down the shaft. It felt like he was on one of those water-slides, but without the water. Martin’s speed picked up. He screamed and heard it echo loudly up and down the shaft. He was racing towards the ventilation shaft grill with no way of slowing down. It was the grill that had reflected the light from his flashlight, or had it? “Is it me, am I going to pass out?” Thought Martin as he bumped and slid along, “these walls are shimmering.” Just as that thought went through his head, Martin’s feet crashed through the grill. He was spit out of the shaft and without the cushion of water; he landed with a horrendous ‘thud’.

Martin lay gasping for air; the wind had been knocked out of him. He tried to raise his head and look around. What he saw surprised him, but all he could mumble was “butterflies”, before he passed out.

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“How much further?” Solomon asked as they scurried along the corridor.

“Not much,” replied Gladly who had taken the lead and was scuttling along in front of Lillian and Solomon.

As they moved along the curved white-walled corridor the overhead lights flashed on as they passed underneath and then quickly turned off once they were onto the next light. It actually produced a strobe-like effect, much like in a dance club.

“Cool!” Solomon said as he waved his arms around like he was dancing. “Look at me Lil!”

“Stop it!” Gladly hissed.

“Brilliant,” thought Lillian as they hurried along. “He must have sensors that detect motion and turn the lights on; good way to conserve energy.”

Lillian had noticed the steel-cage elevator in the middle of the complex as soon as they’d stepped into the corridor. A narrow ladder ran up along side it, like the kind you’d find on a crane in a construction site. Lillian had thought it would be very creepy to climb up. She’d also realized that K.O. Bolt’s complex was much larger than she’d thought.

Finally Gladly stopped. “Okay, this cell is where the Pixies are being held, past it is the one with the Fairies and then the one with Sherman.”

“It’s Darwin,” Lillian and Solomon said in unison.

“Yeah, yeah, whatever.”

“Great, let’s go,” Solomon said as he moved forward but Gladly grabbed his arm, stopping him.

“Wait; there are a few precautions we have to take.”

“Like what?” Lillian asked.

“Like now we have to pay attention to the security cameras,” said Gladly as he pointed up towards the high ceiling.

Lillian and Solomon looked up. Sure enough, two very small cameras were sweeping the corridor in unison.

“How the heck can we get past those?” Lillian sounded defeated.

“Yeah, that looks impossible,” said a discouraged Solomon.

“Oh for heavens sake,” said Gladly, shaking his head. “Look at the sweep they make. See that? There is about a two-second blind-spot right underneath them. We just have to stay really close together and huddle and then wait for the next sweep.”

Lillian watched and counted. “He’s right Solomon. It’s tight and we have to be fast, but I think we can do it.”

“Okay, let’s do it!”

“Five, four, three…”

CLANG

Lillian, Solomon and Gladly froze. There was a second ‘clang’ and then the sound of a motor starting up. It was the elevator, coming down.

“Quickly,” hissed Gladly, “in here.” He quickly opened the door of the Pixie cell a foot or so and shoved Lillian and Solomon inside. “Stay put. I’ll be back.” Gladly then closed the door of the cell and was gone.

Lillian quickly stepped over to the small window in the cell door. She could see Gladly scampering down the corridor. It never occurred to her that he didn't seem to be paying attention to the security cameras.

“What can you see, sis?”

“Not much right now, just an empty corridor but I don't think the elevator has reached the bottom yet.”

Solomon sidled up beside his sister and they both peered out at the corridor. Finally they heard the ‘clang’ of the elevator door. A few seconds later K.O. Bolt rolled into view on his troll-driven cart. The dragon-dogs were behind him, their leashes being handled by a troll. They both ducked as he passed the cell door and then slowly rose up again to watch where he was headed.

“I wonder what he's up to,” Lillian said as K.O. rolled out of view down the corridor.

“I suspect he's gone to collect the new prisoners.”

“Solomon, you can't know that,” Lillian admonished her brother.

“Lil, I didn't say anything.”

“No, I did.”

Lillian and Solomon turned abruptly to face the interior of the cell. As their eyes adjusted to the dim light they realized that they were staring at 80, 90 or possibly 100 Pixies. One of them stepped forward from the crowd. He was slightly taller than the rest and looked like he might be in charge.

“Pinchley Snarklarkin, at your service, and you would be...?”

“Er, um, Lillian Corrigan and this is my brother Solomon. Um, nice to meet you

Mr. Snarklarkin,” Lillian said as she tentatively extended her hand.

Pinchley took her hand and shook it vigorously. “Call me Pinch. So, I hope you’re not here to rescue us, ‘cause we’ve taken a vote. We don’t want to leave.”

“Yes, I mean no, we’re not here to rescue you. We’re here to find our brother. We think he might be in the next cell.”

“Hmm, that’s quite possible,” Pinchley said, stroking his chin in a thoughtful manner, “but we really wouldn’t know, we’re far too comfortable here to worry about what else is going on. Here, let me show you.”

Pinchley turned and lead Lillian and Solomon back through the crowd of waist-high Pixies.

“I feel like Gulliver,” Solomon said out of the corner of his mouth to his sister. Lillian nodded her head in agreement and continued to follow Pinchley through the throng of Pixies.

The cell was huge. It was about 300 meters long but only about 10 meters across. The walls were pristine-white, just like the corridor and everywhere there were small, very comfortable looking Pixie-sized beds. There were many over-stuffed chairs and couches, all draped in dark-blue sheeting and centered around large TV sets. Other areas had video-game consoles and there were even a couple of pinball machines. Small stools stood in front of the pinball machines so the Pixies could reach the game. Towards the back there were a dozen or so dining room tables laden with stacks of dirty dishes and with trays of sandwiches, cookies and fruit. Pinchley lead them to one of the couch groupings and motioned for Lillian and Solomon to sit down on the kid-sized furniture.

“This is, uh, amazing Pinch,” Lillian said as she continued to look around the

large cell.

“Yeah, amazing and look at all that amazing food.”

“Are you hungry young Mister Corrigan?”

“You bet. I’m starving.”

“Well by all means, help yourself. There is more food on the table than we could possibly eat, so go ahead.”

Solomon leapt up and headed over to the tables. He had to bend down considerably to reach the food. The tables were barely past his knees.

“Hey sis, want some?” Solomon had already stuffed two cookies in his mouth and was making a stack of sandwiches on the most clean-looking plate he could find.

Lillian looked at Pinchley, he nodded his head in approval. “Um, yes, an apple and some cookies would be wonderful.” She turned back to Pinchley, “thank you.”

“No problem,” he said as he settled back in a very comfy-looking chair. Most of the other Pixies had drifted back to the games or TV. “Now you can see why we Pixies don’t want to leave. We get clean bedding every day, fresh food and enough things to keep us amused.”

“I can certainly understand why you’d like to stay for the comfort, but don’t you feel at all trapped? And don’t you care that all K.O. Bolt wants is your Pixie dust?”

“Trapped? Maybe occasionally; we don’t want to stay forever, just a few more weeks. We know that lunatic Bolt only wants our Pixie dust and from what I can understand, he’s got all he needs. It’s just that we don’t like him much. We think he’s the one responsible for Pixie parents disappearing over the years and using them as cheap labour. We have no idea where they could be now, so as a small revenge tactic we want

to cost him more money. This is an expensive venture keeping us here.”

Lillian surveyed the cell. It certainly seemed clean enough. “Can I ask how he gets the dust? I mean the floors look clean and so does all the furniture.”

“He gets it from the bedding and sheets on the furniture.”

“Really? But how?”

“Well, Pixie dust is a little like dandruff. It falls out of our scalp and the upper part of our shoulders. So K.O. simply changes the bedding and any other sheeting every morning and gets the trolls to shake them over special barrels to collect it. So far I think he’s got about 16 barrels of the stuff.”

“Great, lots to cause havoc somewhere else.”

“Well, yes. But he could have a small problem.”

Lillian tilted her head, “really, like what?”

“K.O. didn’t do his homework on Pixies. It does have a ‘best before date’ and he shouldn’t have mixed up the younger Pixies’ dust with the more mature,” Pinchley hesitated, “well, if there ever could be such a thing as a more mature Pixie.”

“Really? What will happen?”

“Let’s just say that he’s going to get some interesting results when he thinks people are going to see what they want to see.”

“Oh.” Lillian thought for a moment, “but what about the Fairies dust, why doesn’t he have enough of that yet?”

“Ah yes, the Fairy Dust problem. It seems that those clever little Fairies have been letting the dust they produce float up the ventilation shaft in their cell. And I’m guessing that the shaft is slightly damp, just damp enough to trap the Fairy dust on the sides of the

walls and make them very, very slippery.”

“Mr. Snarklarkin, Pinch, can I ask how Fairies make their dust? I mean, do you know?”

Pinch laughed a little Pixie laugh. “Of course I know! The dust comes from their wings. You should see the cell K.O. has them in! He’s got a lot of very mad Fairies on his hands.”

“But isn’t their cell like this one?”

“Ha! No! He’s got them in a cell with iron grates on the floor and not much else. I guess he was thinking that the dust would drop through the grates and then he would collect it. He’s managed to get a little, but I think those Fairies have outsmarted Mr. Bolt.”

“Oh dear,” giggled Lillian, “even with my basic knowledge of Fairies, I think you’re right, they must be hopping mad! But how or what...”

“Shhh!” Pinch held up his hand to silence Lillian. “I think Mr. Bolt has got his prisoners. We should sneak back to the door. You can probably get a look at who they are.”

Lillian stood up. She looked over to get Solomon’s attention, but he was too busy wolfing down two sandwiches, one in each hand. She rolled her eyes and walked back to the door of the cell. Pinchley Snarklarkin followed her. She stood off to one side of the small window and peered out into the corridor. She ducked back as an angry looking K.O. Bolt rolled past. He was carrying a small wooden cage. In it appeared to be a blinking beetle. She then glanced back through the window. Lillian gasped. It couldn’t be. Being prodded down the corridor by trolls were the Coach and Stink. Behind them

dragged Gladly and behind him were the tail-wagging, foul-breathed dragon-dogs.

“Who is it? Someone you know?”

Lillian let out a big sigh and slumped against the door. “Yes, it’s our supposed rescuers.” But minus one, she thought. I guess blood really is thicker than water.

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Martin slowly opened his eyes and tried to raise his head. “Ouch,” he thought, “that hurts.” He reached up and touched his forehead. He had quite a bump on it. He closed his eyes again; at least that way whatever room or cell he was in would stop spinning. As soon as his eyes were closed he felt a soft fluttering on his forehead. It was delightful, like the softest feather you could possible imagine. He could feel the throbbing lessening, so very cautiously he opened his eyes again. Staring down at him were possibly a couple of hundred of pairs of the brightest eyes he had ever seen. He knew immediately that these were Fairies.

“Are you alright?” They all asked in unison with a collective voice that was like velvet or cream.

All Martin could do was nod. He was dumbstruck. For all the stories he’d heard about Fairies and even though he now knew that they used to be in the Boughtom house garden, he’d never seen one, ever. He was enchanted. Martin moved his head slowly from side to side taking in every small, delicate Fairy face he could. As he looked closer he realized that they were indeed all very different, but all similar in a subtle, graceful kind of way. He realized that the gentle fluttering he’d felt on his face was from their wings. Martin’s reverie was broken by a loud voice off to his right.

“Alright ladies, show’s over; coming through, Fairy Godmother coming through.”

Martin turned his head as far to the right as he could. He had to blink a couple of times to focus. Flapping towards him, about a foot off the ground was the most unlikely example of a Fairy you could possibly imagine. While all the other Fairies were lithe and lean, with floating gossamer gowns and long tapered elegant wings, this Fairy had stubby little wings like a bumble-bee and was almost the shape of a bumble-bee. Her dress looked like a hospital gown and she had the voice of a drill-sergeant. She stopped and hovered just above his right shoulder.

“Are you my Fairy Godmother?”

“What? No you nitwit. I’m all these flutter-brains’ Fairy Godmother.”

“Oh good,” Martin said, relieved.

“What do you mean ‘oh good’?”

“I mean,” Martin blurted, trying to recover, “that it’s good that someone is taking care of all these, um, Fairies.”

“Hmm.” It was a rather disbelieving hmm. She looked up again at the many still lingering Fairies. “C’mon ladies, back to fluttering those wings at the ventilation shaft, we don’t want that Bolt jerk to get any of our precious dust.” She turned back to Martin.

“So I know you came through the ventilation shaft and that might give us a good way out of here, but why?”

“Well, I…”

“You call that fluttering? Put some effort into it!” The Fairy Godmother turned back to Martin.

“Now where were we? Oh yes. I’m Wilda Mastodon a senior FG in these parts and while I appreciate your rescue attempt we still have kind of a situation here.”

Wilda Mastodon? Martin bit his tongue so he wouldn't laugh out loud. Maybe it was possible that her relatives had been mastodons. He was biting his tongue so hard that tears formed in his eyes and then trickled down the side of his face.

"Oh dear," said Wilda, "I see you're having a slight reaction to all this Fairy Dust. Here let me help."

Wilda took the edge of her gown and dabbed at Martin's eyes. Martin suddenly felt ashamed of his reaction to Wilda. "My name provoked enough laughing," he thought. "I shouldn't be making a joke of her name; I know what that's like." He took a deep breath in to calm down and to help resist the urge to laugh out loud.

"Um, Ms. Mastodon, could I please sit up? I think it might clear my head."

"Yes, yes, by all means." She turned to the Fairies fluttering their wings in the ventilation shaft. "Flutter patrol, man down over here, let's get him up," she barked.

Immediately the Fairies flew to his side. Martin was astounded by their speed. The Fairies helped to gently raise up his arms. He slowly pushed himself up to a sitting position but grimaced when he was finally sitting up.

"Grates?" Martin looked down at what he was sitting on. It was very uncomfortable.

"Ah yes," offered Wilda, "Mr. Bolt's method of extracting Fairy dust, so he thinks."

"So," said Wilda flapping at about chest level on Martin, "you were just about to tell us who you were."

"I'm Martin Boughtom and I..."

There was a collective intake of breath from the Fairies. Wilda just about dropped

to the floor of the cell because she stopped flapping momentarily.

“Leonora’s son.” The Fairies said it in unison, almost like a chant. They all hovered and whispered to each other. As much as Martin had been awed by them, they now seemed to be awed by him.

Wilda finally spoke. “You’re Leonora Boughtom’s son?”

“Yes, I am and I’m here to help rescue my friends and get back to Milly in Derry Dell.”

There was another collective gasping and intaking of breath.

“Milly’s back!” The Fairies collectively whispered.

Martin was completely confused. “Could someone explain what is so relevant about my mother or the rest of my family?”

“Do you know anything about your family history Martin?” Wilda asked surprisingly gently. She had regained her composure and was flapping in front of him again.

“Yes, most of it, I think. I mean Milly was explaining some of the details that I never knew about this morning.”

“So she told you how generous your mother was to the Derry Dell Fairies, especially the Garden Fairies?”

“She talked about the fabulous gardens that were at the house and at the convent where my mother had retreated.”

“Your mother was a lovely and generous woman to all the Fairies of Derry Dell, Martin. So was your sister. Milly always had time for the Library Fairies at her job and the few House Fairies that stayed after your mother left.”

Martin nodded, but then looked puzzled. “But what was with the Pixies? She said something about them going underground?”

“Ah yes,” Wilda said solemnly. “That was because of the unauthorized use of Pixie dust by K.O. Bolt. He badgered his wife, Felicity, that poor ninny, to get him some. She thought he was going to use it to give the mine an enhanced look for the investors.”

“So he was going to use Pixie dust to make the mine look like it was full of gold?”

“Something like that,” said Wilda. “Or cobalt, or silver – no-one ever did find out what he was up to. But we do know he used it on Leonora. And that’s how he tricked her into believing that he was Marvin. He carried it on for months, even after you were born. We Fairies knew he was evil and cunning and what he was up to, but we couldn’t get through to her. It took the return of the real Marvin to make the Pixie dust ineffectual.”

Martin was completely baffled. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, well, if the ‘real’ person shows up when a Pixie is trying to trick someone into seeing that person, the dust doesn’t work.”

“No, I mean about K.O. Bolt and my mother.”

This time Wilda did stop flapping. She gasped and dropped to the floor in front of Martin, landing on her feet.

“Then you don’t know?”

“Know what?” Martin was becoming exasperated.

“I thought you said Milly told you your family history?”

“She did, most of it, but then we were interrupted by the Coach and Stink. She was going to tell me about my father and…” Martin’s voice trailed away. He sat

motionless on the floor.

Wilda gently put her small hand on Martin's knee. "I'm sorry Martin, I thought you knew."

Martin looked down, his face ashen. He closed his eyes. When he opened them again, Wilda could see they were brimming with tears.

"Oh Wilda," Martin sobbed. "That evil man is my father. It explains why I'm so different from Milly, why she's tall and beautiful like my mother and her father, Marvin. I'm short and round and ugly and maybe, and maybe evil too. I feel like Cinderella in reverse." He buried his face in his hands.

"Oh Martin, part of you is Leonora and some people, like K.O. Bolt are evil and mean by choice. They often have the option to be good, or be kind and generous but they think they can get further ahead, or be better than the next person or Pixie by only thinking of themselves. You, Martin, are a good person."

Martin raised his head. He was a mess. He had tears covering his face and his nose was running.

"Fairy tissue, pronto!" Wilda barked and snapped her fingers. A dozen or so Fairies fluttered over to Martin with some small pieces of gossamer fabric. Martin wiped his eyes and nose. The fabric was surprisingly absorbent.

"D'you really think I'm a good person?" Martin snuffled.

"Absolutely! Look what you're trying to do, rescue those children!"

"Yes, I suppose you have a point." Martin sat quietly contemplating for a moment. "Oh, but Wilda," Martin slapped his hand to his forehead, "I'm rescuing them from my half-brother!"

“Martin,” said Wilda firmly, “you may have shared a mother with that horrid little Kimmy Bolt, but that’s all. He’s made his choices. I know for a fact that there were a number of families in Derry Dell that wanted to adopt him when he was in his teens, but he refused them all. He seemed to enjoy playing the tragic figure, and then he just disappeared. And now, if my sources are correct, he’s bent on revenge for the entire town.”

Martin thought for a moment. “And I guess I’m the guy that’s going to have to stop him.”

“Along with lots of help,” Wilda said. She was back flapping her tiny wings in front Martin. “Right now, we all need some food and some sleep.” She clapped her hands, “Fairy pillows and cakes, on the double.”

Martin quickly wolfed down a few dozen of the tiniest cakes he’d ever seen. The Fairies giggled while they daintily nibbled on theirs. He then put his head down on masses of Fairy pillows and within minutes was sound asleep, despite the uncomfortable grate beneath him. The Fairies wrapped their wings around themselves and then delicately attached the tops of their wings to silken spider-like threads that crisscrossed the cell wall. Wilda had a much stronger looking hammock of silken threads. She flopped into it, face first and was soon sound asleep. The only sound heard in the cell was the occasional ‘bzzz’ of Wilda’s tiny wings.

Next door, in the Pixie cell, Lillian and Solomon had pulled together a number of Pixie chairs and had collapsed on them, exhausted. Further down the passage-way, the Coach and Stink huddled in a corner of their cell. At their feet was a small wooden cage. In it was Stink’s little beetle friend. With only Stink’s long scarf to keep them warm and

the knapsack as a lumpy pillow, they finally drifted off to sleep.

It had been a long day and for now, everything was quiet.