

CHAPTER TWELVE

One Final Surprise

Darwin awoke with a start. He sat bolt upright, trying to orient himself. “Oh yeah,” he remembered, “I’m in the Old Pruitt house.” He strained to see the far side of the large bedroom. Without his glasses it was almost impossible and the pre-dawn light made it even more difficult. He could hear the distinctive song of a male cardinal. Aunt Ina had taught him that he was kind of telling other male cardinals to ‘buzz off’ this was his territory. Darwin sat for a few minutes trying to sort out in his mind the events of the last 36 hours. Then realizing that he was still exhausted, he slowly slumped back on the pillow and was almost asleep when he hit it.

Tap, tap, tap – there were three short knocks on Darwin’s door.

“Mister D, are you awake yet?” A voice said on the other side of the door. “I’ve brought up some breakfast for you.”

Darwin yawned and stretched. He rolled over on his left side and looked at the large, old-fashioned alarm clock on the side table. The black hands stood out clearly on the white face. “Eight-thirty,” said Darwin to himself, “I guess it’s time to get up.” He took one last snuggle under the blankets. “Boy,” he thought, “this is way better than that creepy cell I slept in last night. I wonder where Lillian and Solomon are. You’d think they’d have figured out I’m at the Old Pruitt house by now. And that Knock-Out Dolt guy, what a fart-brain.” Darwin continued snuggling under the very cozy down-filled comforter. “First he throws me in a cell and tells me all Corrigans are horrible and then the next morning he’s all sweet and nice, kind of like Lillian when she wants a favour,

like cleaning Squeezer the cat's litter box. It's her cat, she should do it. Hey, thinking about farts, I wonder how she likes the new rings on her phone! Ha, that was so easy to do!" Darwin buried his face in the exquisitely soft pillow. "Now I can see why Solomon wants to sleep in all the time. This is really comfortable. The only thing he does better than sleeping is eating. Hey, I am hungry."

"Mister D? I have breakfast for you."

That finally got Darwin's attention. He leapt out of bed and padded across to the door. "Wow, thanks Stan. This looks great," he said as he opened the door.

Stan had comforted and consoled Darwin after K.O. Bolt brought him up in the elevator from the cell in the mine. Darwin had been understandably upset and he didn't trust K.O. Bolt. Stan had listened to Darwin's tale – the trolls, the dragon-dogs, the cold cell for the night, the fact that no-one had rescued him yet – with a sympathetic ear. He'd also poured Darwin a soothing hot bath, brought him a sandwich and hot tea and had left fluffy towels to dry off with. Stan had also cleaned and ironed Darwin's clothes while he was bathing.

"Yummy, pancakes, my fave!" Darwin managed to get out before he shoveled a huge portion into his mouth. He sat at a small desk in front of an enormous bay window that looked out over all of Derry Dell. "Hey, I can see almost all of Main Street from here even without my glasses!"

"Indeed, one can," said Stan. "You can see all the bridges on the river, too." He quickly and quietly tidied up the bed Darwin had slept in. The bed was fittingly large for the room and Stan had to stand on his tiptoes to reach the middle and fluff the pillows and smooth out the puffy teal-coloured comforter. The bedroom was in a word, grand -

hardwood floors gleamed, glass-like, the walls were covered in a rich ochre-coloured fabric and the magnificent fireplace had a mantel that was covered in intricate carvings, likely hand-done. Two burgundy over-sized and over-stuffed high back chairs, one with an ottoman, sat ready for someone to relax and enjoy a roaring fire.

Darwin continued stuffing pancakes into his mouth, but then suddenly stopped. “Oh, I think I ate too fast. I feel like I’m going to explode,” he groaned pushing the plate away.

“Perhaps a sip of your milk might help wash things down,” suggested Stan pleasantly.

“Yeah, good idea.” Darwin took a swig of his milk and then patted his stomach. “There, that feels better already.” He turned and faced Stan. “How come you know so much about kid things when you’re just, um, Dolt’s servant? Do you have kids?” Being subtle was not on Darwin’s agenda.

“Well young Mister D., some things are just common sense. Secondly, I kind of came with the house when Mr. Bolt rented it and yes, a long time ago I did have a kid.”

The answer seemed to satisfy Darwin, he was obviously now thinking about something else.

“Hey, you know that Dolt guy sure is nosy.” Darwin picked up the cleaned clothes that Stan had left on the bed and quickly put on his t-shirt and shorts. He’d slept in his underwear. “Are you going to show me the rest of the house like you promised yesterday? Is Knock-Out going to be around? He kind of creeps me out.”

Stan looked at Darwin with an amused expression on his face. “You do have the attention span of a flea, don’t you?”

“What?” Darwin said as he pulled on his socks and mashed his feet into his battered sneakers.

“Nothing,” Stan said, shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders.

“Okay, let’s go. This place looks like its pretty cool.”

Stan picked up the breakfast tray he’d brought Darwin and headed out the bedroom door after his young charge. Stan made it to the open landing just as Darwin flung himself down the grandiose curved railing of the wide, sweeping staircase. Stan had completely forgotten how much energy young people have. He slowly and carefully carried the breakfast tray down the stairs.

**

Martin had a blissful expression on his face as he rolled over onto his right side, despite the fact that he’d slept on a grate all night. He would have fallen back to sleep completely if not for the insistent but gentle ‘pat, pat, pat’ on his left shoulder. “Hmmpfh” mumbled Martin, “just five more minutes.” The patting continued. “I’m having the most wonderful dream Mrs. Smitherwinky about Fairies and soft pillows, just five more minutes.” Martin hadn’t even opened his eyes.

“No Martin, it’s not Mrs. Smitherwinky. It’s Wilda Mastodon and you’ve got to get up so we can get out of here.”

“Huh?” Martin opened his eyes immediately, he seemed disoriented. “Uh, oh, I completely forgot where I was.” He sat up quickly, rubbing his eyes. “Sorry, Wilda.”

“I’m glad you slept soundly. Our Fairy pillows are renowned for providing the best sleep possible,” Wilda said proudly. “Now, if you want to freshen up the um, er, privacy facilities are over there.” She pointed to the end of the cell and a short doorway.

“Then we’ve got breakfast buns for you. Here’s a towel.” Wilda handed Martin something that resembled an embroidered table napkin.

**

Lillian yawned and stretched. She had a dreamy expression on her face – like the one you have when you wake up from a really goodnight’s sleep. She raised herself up on her elbows and looked across at Solomon. He was still sound asleep, snoring slightly and sprawled out across two arm-chairs and a couch.

“Good morning,” said a voice brightly.

Lillian turned. Because she was lying down, she actually had to look up at Pinchley Snarklarkin. “Good morning to you, Pinch.”

“I trust you slept well?”

Lillian nodded and yawned and stretched again.

“Wonderful! And it appears that your brother is still enjoying his repose,” said Pinchley chuckling.

Solomon did indeed look comfortable in what should have been an uncomfortable position. He was lying face down with his head on one arm of the small couch. His body was bowed and resting on the middle part of the couch and his feet dangled off the end of the second chair.

“Time to get him up?” Lillian asked.

“Not quite yet. I really wanted to talk to you since you seem to be the, uhm, more serious one. But first have some breakfast.” Pinchley motioned towards a couple of small tables that were laden with baskets of fresh strawberries, pitchers of orange juice and plates of blueberry muffins.

Lillian helped herself and then sat back down. “How did you keep us hidden from the trolls? They brought all this food in, didn’t they?”

“Yes, they did. Unfortunately when K.O. trollerizes them or gnominate them they lose all ability to communicate and besides, he’s not their most favourite person on the planet. He barely acknowledges their existence.”

“Can they be turned back? I mean is there a reverse switch?”

“I don’t know,” said Pinchley, sadly. “I do know that the trolls or gnomes he has for his own personal use aren’t from Derry Dell. I’m afraid they’re probably a long way from their homes.”

Lillian sat quietly contemplating and munching her muffin. “I just hope he hasn’t done anything with the Flatchett boys yet.”

“I don’t think so,” said Pinchley. “Usually when he uses his device there’s a huge energy drop and the lights dim, or so Stan told me.”

“Stan? Who is Stan?” Lillian said as she popped the last of her strawberries into her mouth.

“Apparently he came with the house, that’s all I know. I’ve had a few chats with him on my ramblings around the place.”

“How do you get out?”

Pinchley chuckled. “I told you K.O. Bolt doesn’t need more Pixie dust, so he makes sure the cell door is left open, in the hopes that we’ll all leave. He also leaves access to the tunnel. Like I said, we’re costing him money.”

Lillian nodded. “Oh yeah, now I remember. Now, what did you want to talk about?”

“About getting you and your brothers out of here,” said a now serious looking Pinchley.

“That should be easy,” shrugged Lillian. “I’ll just wake up Solomon, he can break down the door to Darwin’s cell, get the Coach and Stink from their cell, let the Fairies go and we’ll go back out the tunnel. We’ll get help from town to get the Flatchett boys.”

“I wish it was that easy Lillian. But Darwin isn’t in the cell next door anymore.”

“What do you mean? That’s where Gladly told us he was. He was leading us to him when K.O. came to check out his new prisoners.”

“I know and up until yesterday morning, that is where Darwin was. But Stan showed up and took him up to the house and right now, I don’t know where he is.”

“Nooo!” Wailed a distraught Lillian. “That can’t be!”

“I’m afraid it is. The only option you have is to get up into the old Pruitt house.”

“But how? The only way up is the elevator and K.O. would hear that coming.”

“There is another way,” said Pinchley slowly.

The look of realization spread across Lillian’s face and her eyes opened wide.

“You can’t mean...?”

“It’s the only way,” said a somber Pinchley.

“No, no,” said Lillian quickly, “we can go back through the tunnel and out the highway and up the hill.”

“And how do you propose getting there?”

“We’ll get the Coach and Stink out of their cell. My guess is that the Coach’s van is at the tunnel entrance. We’ll go back through the tunnel and drive up to the Pruitt house.”

“Lillian that would take too long.”

“No, no it wouldn’t. I’ll get Solomon up right now.” She stood up and walked briskly over to where Solomon was still sleeping.

“Lillian,” said Pinchley with a hint of frustration in his voice – very unusual for a Pixie. “You can’t use the tunnels. They’re developing miniscule structural cracks in them and if you look closely at the upper walls there are tiny cracks developing too. This whole underground structure isn’t safe anymore. K.O. didn’t build it to last. Why do you think he used Styrofoam walls? As much as we Pixies would love to free-load off Mr. Bolt a lot longer, we can’t. We have to get everybody out.”

Lillian flopped down in a chair beside Solomon, defeated. “So we have to...”

“Yes Lillian. We all have to climb the ladder to the Pruitt house and soon.”

“I hate heights,” Lillian moaned as she nudged Solomon’s foot to wake him up.

**

The Coach lay spread-eagled on the cell floor, using the knapsack as a pillow. He snorted and snuffled loudly in his sleep. Stink had taken his long scarf and wound it around himself, mummy-style to stay warm. He’d taken the tassels at the end of the scarf and stuffed them into his ears, desperately trying to muffle the racket of the Coach’s snoring – to no avail. Finally with one final snort, the Coach sat upright and with a couple of blinks of his eyes was wide awake. He quickly stood up and jogged on the spot.

“Best sleep I’ve had in years, Stink old chum,” said the Coach as he did a few jumping jacks and deep-knee bends. “No dogs barking, no birds chirping, just good old silence, absolutely invigorating!”

Stink groaned a tinkly little groan and slowly started unwinding the scarf.

The Coach rummaged in the knapsack and pulled out a bottle of now quite warm water, a couple of Crunchy Chews and an orange. “Well at least we can start with this until we figure out what’s going on.”

Stink stood up, stretched and then quickly crossed his legs. “Bathroom,” was all he could manage to squeak out.

The Coach looked perplexed for a moment and then spotted a small metal bucket in the corner by the door of the cell. “Sorry Stink, that looks like all our host has to offer. Um, you can go first.”

Stink grimaced and then raced over to the corner. He came back and sat down beside the Coach, looking significantly relieved and daintily picked up a section of orange.

“So here’s how I see it,” said the Coach as he took the last bite of a Crunchy Chew. “I figure this Bolt guy separated us, you know, like divide and conquer. Martin’s probably somewhere down here, too, and maybe even the kids. So if we can break down the cell door and find the lay of the land, we can plan an escape when we re-group with everyone.”

“I think Lillian and Solomon might have been in this exact cell.” Stink said quietly.

“Now we can’t go creating a plan on wishful thinking, Stink. If they were in this cell then that means hopefully they’re close by, but we have no proof that they were here. That Bolt guy has probably got a bunch of cells down here.”

“But they were here.”

“Stink I…” the Coach stopped speaking as Stink held up the bandana Lillian had

been wearing. “Well I’ll be.”

**

“Wow, look at this place!” Darwin exclaimed as he vaulted himself off the banister and stood looking around.

Stan finally made it down the stairs with the breakfast tray and stopped beside Darwin. “Magnificent isn’t it?”

“So come on, show me around,” demanded Darwin.

“Just let me get these dishes into the kitchen...” Stan sighed as he watched Darwin dash into the huge great room. He took the tray and put it on a side-table by the stairs and trailed after Darwin.

Darwin raced over to one of the very large, two-storey windows and peered out, pressing his hands on the glass. “Cool, are we high up or what!”

“Yes,” said Stan as he came up behind Darwin and removed his hands and wiped his fingerprints from the window, “we are quite elevated from Derry Dell. The view is spectacular, don’t you think?”

Darwin wasn’t much into views. He looked up at Stan and noticed that he wasn’t looking at the scenery or town below, but across the valley, where you could see a couple of houses nestled in the trees. Darwin turned and looked back at the rest of the room. “Kinda big for one person, isn’t it?”

The Pruitt house was indeed big. The great room soared up to the second floor of the house with enormous windows on three sides. A gigantic fireplace took up the fourth wall and was made of stones that were almost boulder size. Two balconies, one on either side of the fireplace overlooked the great room from the second floor. The ceiling was

criss-crossed with massive carved cherry wood beams. The great room was sparsely furnished with only a couple of large couches and over-stuffed chairs. Most of the furniture was covered with large white sheets.

“So what else is there to see?” Darwin was bored with the house tour already.

“There is an extraordinary kitchen, with marble floors and granite counter tops. The main entrance way, the foyer, just back over there, has an exquisite hand-cut crystal chandelier. There is some more lovely wood carving in the study and computer room and...”

“Where’s that?” Darwin suddenly was paying attention.

“The study?” said Stan. “It’s near the front entrance but I’m afraid that’s off-limits.”

Darwin was already making a bee-line for the front foyer.

“No, no,” Stan said hurriedly and hustled after Darwin, “you can’t go into the computer room. I don’t even go in there.”

Darwin was half-way across the wide front foyer when the large wood carved door to the study and computer room opened. Darwin stopped in his tracks. Stan had caught up and stopped behind him.

K.O. Bolt had opened the door but had turned to talk to someone in the room. Through the partially opened door, Stan and Darwin could see part-way into the study. The walls were covered with heavy wooden shelves that were filled with books. They could see on the far wall a large window that looked out on an over-grown garden. Sitting on stacks of books were a number of monitors. In front of the monitors were foot-stools with keyboards on them. Working away on the keyboards and watching the ever-

changing pictures on the monitors were a number of Trolls. Or were they Gnomes? Sometimes it was difficult to tell them apart.

“So you put those two brats in with the Pixies and you blocked the tunnel entrance again?” K.O. Bolt was saying.

“Yep, everything is taken care of, boss.”

“Don’t call me boss. It’s Mr. Bolt to you.” With that K.O. Bolt swung the door completely open and turned to face a stunned looking Stan and Darwin, behind him stood a preening Gladly Yarble. His jacket was now back to all it’s colourful glory. Amazing what a little dust will do for you.

“I was just showing young Mister Darwin here around the house and he expressed interest in seeing the study, sir.”

K.O. Bolt glowered angrily at both of them. “Well, there, now you’ve seen it,” he said as he hastily shut the door.

“Ah, come on, you must have some computer games or something I could play.” Darwin whined.

K.O. Bolt bristled. You could see his jaw working furiously as he bit down hard. He drummed his fingers together, trying to compose himself. He looked up at Stan.

“So has our young guest been enjoying himself?”

“He’s had a very good breakfast and we were just taking in the view from the great room.”

“Yeah, but now I’m bored.” Huffed Darwin. “When are my sister and brother going to get here? I want to go home.”

“I’m sure you’ll see them very soon,” said K.O. Bolt as a sardonic grin crept

across his face. He couldn't help himself.

BRINNNGG. BRINNNGG.

“Shall I get that sir?” said Stan at the sound of the old-styled front door bell.

“No, you deal with our little friend here. Make him a sandwich. Take him out to the garden. Show him the dogs, or something. I'll get the door.”

K.O. Bolt stomped over to the door. He was not on his Troll cart, so he had to reach up to get the door handle. He opened the door and there stood Milly Boughtom. K.O. Bolt gasped. Stan turned white. Darwin, although no purveyor of beauty, just simply stared at the lovely vision in the doorway.

**

Martin scrunched down over the miniscule sink in the Fairies bathroom. He splashed his face with cold water and then patted dry with the small embroidered towel. “I feel like Alice in Wonderland,” he thought. He squished back through the door and headed back to the centre of the cell where Wilda and the rest of the Fairies waited.

“So Wilda, what's the plan?”

“Well, we've heard through the spider-vine that these tunnels are not very safe anymore, so we have to figure out a way to get out of here.”

“Hmmm.” Martin sat and thought for a moment. “What about if I break down the door and see where that leads?”

“Oh, we know where that leads,” said Wilda, shaking her head, “to the corridors and a possible encounter with K.O. Bolt's dragon-dogs. Fairies are terrified of dogs. They're always barking at us in gardens, the woods, and flower gardens – where ever they spot us. K.O. Bolt didn't even lock the door.”

Martin nodded his head. He looked around the cell. He looked down through the grates to see if there was the possibility of a tunnel underneath the cell. Then he looked up at the ventilation shaft.

“Wilda, I know how I can get the Fairies out!” Martin stood up quickly, too quickly. He bashed his head on the top of the cell. “Ouch!”

Many of the Fairies immediately started fluttering around his head.

“I’m okay,” he grinned at them. He turned back and stared down at Wilda, who was hovering about knee-level. “The ventilation shaft, I can put you up as close as possible to the top of the ventilation shaft. You might have to scramble up the last couple of feet, but then you should be home-free!”

Wilda cocked her head. “Scramble?” She said. “Fairies don’t scramble Martin. Look at them; their feet hardly ever touch the ground.”

“Well, I can hand lift them as far up as possible,” said Martin hopefully. “Then it would only be a tiny little bit of scrambling.”

Wilda thought for a moment. “Okay ladies, listen up! Here’s the plan. Mr. Boughtom is going to gently place you as close to the top of the ventilation shaft as he possibly can. You are then going to get to the top of the shaft and flutter out of the tunnel. Got it?”

The Fairies all nodded and giggled in unison.

“Your feet may touch the ground.” There was an audible gasp. “Get over it,” bellowed Wilda. “This is our only way out.”

Martin proceeded to hand lift about five Fairies at a time up the ventilation shaft. There were a few giggles at first but then a lot of ‘ughs’ and ‘ews’ as the Fairies feet

touched the ground. Finally only Wilda was left.

“Okay Wilda, let’s go,” said Martin as he extended his hand to the fluttering Fairy Godmother.

“Absolutely not,” huffed Wilda, crossing her arms defiantly.

“Come on now Wilda. I’ll get you to the top of the shaft and then I’ll follow you up.”

“No you won’t.”

“Yes I will.”

“No, you can’t.”

“What do you mean I can’t?”

“Martin there is so much Fairy dust on the walls of the shaft right now, it would be like trying to stand on six million banana peels. We’ll go out the door and find out how K.O. Bolt gets down here and then find a way to sneak out.”

“But Wilda.”

“No. That’s the end of it. I’m not about to abandon Leonora’s son. My reputation wouldn’t be worth a bag of spider farts, pardon the expression.”

Martin let out an exasperated sigh. “Okay, okay. But at least let me put you in my pocket for protection.” Martin picked up Wilda and very gently put her in one of the pockets of his red jacket. “Are you okay?” He asked.

“I’m fine,” said Wilda. She was actually standing in Martin’s pocket and holding onto the edge so she could see. “Let’s open the door.”

With that Martin slid back the bolt on the door. Wilda was right, it wasn’t locked. He cautiously opened the door and peered into the corridor. It was empty and quiet. He

ducked down, went through the doorway and stood up.

At exactly the same moment, Pinchley Snarklarkin opened the door of the Pixie cell. He stepped into the corridor, followed by Lillian and Solomon. Lillian looked down the corridor and gasped.

“You!”

Martin spun around. “Lillian, Solomon!”

“Who’s that?” Asked Pinchley.

“Bolt’s brother,” said Lillian, now pointing at Martin. “That’s K.O. Bolts brother!”

Pinchley Snarklarkin put his fingers to his lips and let out a shrill whistle. “Pixie patrol, now!”

Lillian suddenly noticed Wilda in Martin’s pocket. “And look he’s kidnapping a Fairy!”

“No, Lillian, you’ve got it...” was all Martin managed to get out. He was immediately set upon by fifteen or sixteen Pixies.

Lillian raced forward and grabbed Wilda from Martin’s jacket pocket. She tore back to Solomon, zipped open the top of the knapsack that was on his back and gently placed Wilda in the opening. “There, there,” said Lillian to a sputtering Wilda, “you’re safe now.”

The Pixies managed to stuff Martin back through the smallish door and slam it shut. There was a key-pad door lock on the wall, so the Pixies kept poking at numbers until they heard a bolt slide into place.

Pinchley Snarklarkin started up the skinny elevator maintenance ladder followed

by Solomon, a wary-looking Lillian and then the rest of the Pixies. They climbed quickly and were soon out of ear-shot of Martin pounding on the Fairy cell door.

**

Milly strode confidently into the foyer. She turned back to K.O. Bolt as he closed the door. "I know who you are and I think you have some explaining to do."

"Hmm," said K.O. Bolt. "And let me guess, you're Milly Boughtom, perhaps better known as Smelly Boughtom, the half-sister to that half-wit that also happens to be my half-brother."

Just then one of the Trolls from the study waddled over in his peculiar gait. He tugged at K.O. Bolt's sleeve and then mumbled something that only K.O. understood.

"I'll be right back."

Stan continued to stand rigidly in the foyer. Darwin looked puzzled, but continually kept looking over at Milly and blushing.

When K.O. Bolt returned he looked angrier than before. "Idiotic Fairies. I don't know how they managed to get into the tunnel and attempt an escape, but no matter, thanks to an observant Troll I've managed to trap them all in pine gum netting. My Troll team is off to get them. Now where were we?"

"You need to explain this," said Milly as she pulled what looked like a contract out of her large leather purse. She handed it to K.O. Bolt.

"Ah yes, one of my contracts. Is there a problem?" He smiled sweetly, but sarcastically at Milly.

"You know darn well there is a problem. Even by your own legally tenuous contract you can't take anyone under the age of ten."

“Yes, and your point being?”

Milly pointed at Darwin. “He isn’t ten, so you can’t turn him into to a Gnome and you have to let him go.”

Darwin suddenly spoke up. “Hey, but I’m ten tomorrow! I’m going to be a tweenager!”

“See, dear lady,” K.O. sneered at Milly, “in a few hours I’ll have no problem. He’ll be ten and he’ll be mine.”

“Oh no, you don’t K.O. Bolt.” Milly pulled out more papers from her purse. “I’ve been doing some research on you and you truly are a despicable little man. Your worldwide Gnome business is fueled by lost and desperate children. You promise them everything and then turn them into Gnomes to be sold around the world.”

“Yes I know. It’s a lovely business isn’t it? And thriving too. I think people appreciate the ‘money back guarantee’ and find the ‘care and feeding of your Gnome books’ highly amusing.”

Darwin was looking frightened. “I don’t want to be a Gnome.”

“Oh stop sniveling,” snapped K.O. Bolt, “you’ll simply be joining your brother and sister.”

“Nooooo!” Darwin wailed. He turned to Stan, still standing like a statue, for comfort. Surprisingly, Stan put his arm around Darwin’s shoulder.

“And then I’ll deal with the Pixies. Not as lucrative as children, much smaller, I have to charge less. But they are popular in certain parts of the world. I actually experimented on the local adult Pixies and then needed a couple of youngsters. The Yarble brothers fit the bill quite nicely, such willing participants, too.”

K.O. Bolt hadn't noticed Gladly saunter out of the study. He'd heard the last bit of ranting about the Pixies and his brothers. His coat darkened. Stan turned just in time to see Gladly slinking off towards the elevators to the cells below the house.

"You are the most horrid man I've ever met," said Milly, totally aghast.

"Thank you, I do try," said K.O., smirking at first, then his face clouded over with evil anger. "But no more horrid than this wretched little town and all of its smug, self-righteous people. Look what they did to my father, to me. They ruined my family. I was left destitute, an orphan. No-one cared. Well, now it's pay back time."

The timing for K.O. Bolt couldn't have been more perfect. Just as he finished his rant at Milly, Darwin and Stan, the Trolls arrived back with the pine-gum net full of Fairies. Then the service door for the elevator burst open and out tumbled Pinchley Snarklarkin, all the other Pixies and Lillian and Solomon. K.O. Bolt snapped his fingers and in an instant the Pixies and Lillian and Solomon were surrounded, this time by Gnomes.

K.O. Bolt clapped his hands like a little child. He had a huge grin on his face. "Oh I do so love family reunions! This is perfect. The family that Gnominate together, well," he thought for a moment, "won't be staying together!" He laughed a maniacal laugh. Milly visibly shivered.

"Lillian, Solomon, I knew you'd save me!" Darwin tried to race towards his sister and brother, but was stopped by two solid Gnomes who shoved him back towards Stan.

"Mr. Bolt, sir, I think you should let the child go to his brother and sister."

"Who said that?"

"I did, sir," said Stan.

K.O. Bolt shrugged. “I guess you’re right. It will be one of the last times they’ll see each other.”

Stan gave Darwin a gentle shove towards Lillian and Solomon. They both grabbed him and gave him a long and hard hug. Finally Lillian looked up; she had tears in her eyes.

“Thank you. Who are you?”

“My name is,” Stan turned and faced Milly, “Stanley Marvin Boughtom.”

K.O. Bolt gasped, he was good at that. The Corrigan children looked stunned. But this time it was Milly whose face went white.

**

Coach and Stink sat staring glumly at the floor. Stink was fingering Lillian’s bandana – the one he’d found in the cell. They’d banged on the door a few times and rattled the sliding bolt, but the door to the cell was firmly shut and the Coach and Stink realized they’d just have to wait for something to happen.

Like he had with Lillian and Solomon, Gladly opened the cell door quietly. But this time it was a little more difficult to remain undetected. Gladly had the two dragon-dogs with him and it didn’t take long for their pungent odor to be noticed by the Coach and Stink.

Coach had closed his eyes, more out of boredom than being tired and as his nose started to twitch from the dragon-dogs, he waved his arm in Stink’s direction.

“Phew, Stink, that stinks,” said the Coach without opening his eyes.

“Uh, Coach, you might want to open your eyes, we have visitors,” chimed Stink.

“Holy medicine balls,” Coach exclaimed as he sat up and stared at both Gladly

and the two dragon-dogs, “who let the dogs out?”

“I guess I did, or have,” Gladly said, a little sheepishly. “Look, I really want to try and fix a few things.”

“Fix a few things?” Tinkled Stink. “Haven’t you fixed enough things, mostly for your benefit?” Stink was watching the Pixie Coat of Shame as Gladly spoke. There were patches of light colour, but mostly the coat had swirling patterns of grey and purple traveling across the fabric. It suddenly twigged for Stink. “What’s happened to your brothers, Gladly?” The colours on the coat darkened considerably.

Gladly’s shoulders slumped and he sobbed out loud. The dragon-dogs tugged at their leashes. Gus looked like he wanted to play; Stench had a look that made Stink think he could be dinner. Gladly snapped at the leashes, “Gus, Stench, stay.”

“Where are they?” Stink said gently.

“Somewhere, I don’t know where,” snuffled Gladly, wiping his nose on his sleeve. “They’re lawn ornaments. K.O. lied to me. I think he tricked a lot of Pixies and now he has the Corrigan children, all of the Pixies and he recaptured the Fairies. He’ll have all the dust he needs. But he’ll never get these back,” said Gladly defiantly, motioning to Gus and Stench.

“Why would anyone want either one of those back?” The Coach finally spoke up.

“Oh these are K.O’s pride and joy. He paid a wizard a lot of money to make them this way, but I’ve got this,” Gladly reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out something that looked like a glow-light you’d get at a concert, or a dollar store.

“Sooo…” said Stink, “and what exactly does that do?”

“It’s a wizard stick and all I have to do is break it in the middle, here and the two

components get mixed together.”

“And then what happens?” The Coach was now over madly patting Gus’s head and keeping a close watch on Stench.

“Then I give each of these guys a little slurp and bingo, before you know it, they’re back to your basic dog and basic Komodo dragon.”

“Hmmm,” said Stink. “This gives me an idea. Where is K.O. and everybody right now?”

“Up by the great room in the house. They’re all there, the kids, the Fairies, the Pixies, countless Gnomes, Stan and oh yeah, some really beautiful woman.”

“Milly!” The Coach and Stink shouted in unison. “What about Martin?”

“Nope, didn’t see him.”

“Who’s Stan?”

“He came with the house. I don’t know, he’s like the butler or something.”

“What about the Gnomes or Trolls, how nasty can they get?”

“Well, the Trolls are almost useless. When they get nervous or feel intimidated they just kind of rock back and forth. If K.O. gives the Gnomes the stack order, they stack three up and then you have to watch out for flying little feet and hands. They’re strong for their size, too, and I wouldn’t want to have one sit on me.”

“Where was K.O. storing the Pixie and Fairy dust?”

“There’s probably a barrel of Pixie dust still next door in the Pixie’s deserted cell and here,” Gladly held out his hand, “this is a bag of pure Fairy dust.”

Stink took the small bag. “You’re not supposed to have this you know.”

“I know. I’ve really botched up things, haven’t I?”

Stink didn't say anything. He just looked at Gladly and felt a little bit sad for him.

"So do we have a plan?" The Coach was still scrunching up Gus's ears. The dog was giving the Coach big slobbery kisses. Stench's back end looked like it was going to wag off.

"Yep," said Stink brightly, "I'll tell you what we're going to do in the elevator. And with a little bit of that Pixie dust I think we might be able to pull this off. Let's see what we can use of our gear."

The Coach and Stink grabbed their things. Stink took his little beetle friend out of his cage and put him in his pocket. Gladly clutched tightly at the dragon-dog leashes and they all headed out into the corridor. First stop was the former Pixie cell. Sure enough a barrel of Pixie dust was just inside the door, waiting to be picked up. They all took scoops of it. Then they headed over to the elevator while Stink started to tell them the plan.

"What's that noise," said Stink suddenly.

"I can't hear anything," said the Coach. "Is it your Dewberry pinging?"

"No, listen," Stink said in his delightful tinkly voice.

Sure enough there was a constant plink, plink, plink. They all stood quietly listening and then realized that it had to be coming from the cell that had held the Fairies.

"But they're all captured upstairs." Said Gladly, puzzled.

"Well, someone or something has to be making a constant noise like that." Stink walked over and lightly tapped on the door. "Hello. Anyone there?"

There was a bit of a scuffling sound, a thud and then a loud, "ouch!"

"Is someone there? A voice said. "I'm trapped, the door's locked."

“Martin?” The Coach said, excitedly.

“Coach?”

Almost simultaneously, they both said “I’ll break the door down!” And almost as simultaneously, they both started throwing themselves at the Fairy cell door, but from different directions – absolutely defeating the purpose.

Finally, after about three tries, Stink suggested that they should perhaps try one at a time to determine which way the door was weakest. It proved to be Martin’s side and after a couple of good shoulder bashes and then a battering with his legs and feet, the door creaked on its hinges and fell into the corridor. Martin crawled out on his hands and knees and stood up. The Coach immediately threw his arms around Martin.

“Boy, am I glad to see you! We’re dealing with a real crack-pot here, Martin. He’s certainly beyond my comprehension.”

“I’m assuming that was your head we heard getting smacked when you stood up,” asked Stink. “Are you okay.”

Martin rubbed his head. “Yeah, I’m getting used to doing that.” He turned at looked at Gladly. “Nice pets, are they yours?”

“Nope, just the prized possessions of K.O. Bolt and that’s how we’re going to get him, right?”

“I think they’ll prove useful,” said Stink, thoughtfully.

“Ah yes, K.O. Bolt,” Martin said, all of a sudden quite serious. “I think there’s something you should know.”

**

Milly’s hand went up to her face as she finally gasped, “father?”

“Yes, Milly.”

K.O. Bolt looked back and forth from Stan to Milly. Slowly an evil grin worked its way across his face. “Am I lucky or what! I didn’t even know I had the butterfly freak dad and now the daughter lands in my lap! I amaze myself sometimes! Oh this is just too perfect; my revenge is going to be so complete!”

“Not if I can help it, Bolt,” Stan said, turning to face K.O.

“Oh gee, Stan, or should I call you Smarvin, what are you going to do? Pummel me with Pixies? Fight me with Fairies? Get those Corrigan brats to stand up to me? What?”

“Well, first of all, I’m going to throw you out of my house.”

“Huh? You mean the Pruitt house belongs to you? Since when?”

“Since ten years ago when you first started renting it and building your subterranean revenge structure - I wanted to keep an eye on you, so I told you I came with the house. I also wanted to preserve the magnificent wood work my father, Miles had done, it was the only connection I had left with him.”

“Marvin, father,” Milly said quietly, “you mean you’ve been back in Derry Dell for ten years? Why didn’t you say anything or keep me from leaving? You could have at least contacted poor Martin. He desperately needed someone.”

“I know Milly, but I felt too ashamed. I’d deserted your mother, you, your baby brother...”

“He’s my brother!” Screeched K.O. Bolt, “and Leonora loved my father!”

“No she didn’t Bolt, your father tricked her with Pixie dust.”

There was an audible collective gasp from the Pixies. K.O. Bolt turned and glared

at them. “As if you didn’t know my mo..., my mo...”

“You mean Felicity, your mother?” Stan said.

K.O. Bolt took a sharp breath in and then turned such a deep angry colour of red that everyone thought he would explode.

“Felicity was badgered for Pixie dust by your father. Your mother was quite sweet K.O., but your father wanted Leonora. He had been obsessed with her since high school. He wouldn’t give up and when I selfishly left on my butterfly hunting excursion, he moved in. He knew all Leonora wanted to see was me, so he used the Pixie dust on her and let her believe that I’d come back.”

K.O. Bolt was seething. His eyes had become black and piercing. “No,” he snapped back at Stan, “my father was led astray by Leonora, she pursued him.”

It was obvious that nothing was going to change K.O. Bolt’s mind.

“But Marvin, father,” Milly was still trying to sort out everything in her mind, “why didn’t you come back to mother, she still loved you.”

“After that horrible day at the house when I found Kenwick Bolt with her I kind of went crazy. I took my amazing collection of butterflies and toured the world giving lectures at universities and colleges. I was paid to set up a number of butterfly houses and collections. After I’d stayed away for years, I did come back, once, only to find out that Leonora had retreated to a nunnery and had taken a vow of silence. I was heartbroken. I made sure that both you and Martin were doing okay and then I cowardly left again.”

Stan hung his head. “I’m so ashamed Milly. I let you down and I let Martin down.”

“He’s my brother, Martin is more my brother than he is your son,” screamed K.O. Bolt. “How can you care about him and not care about me!”

Stan calmly turned back to K.O. Bolt. “Because Kimmie Bolt, you won’t acknowledge the truth and because you can’t seem to let go of the past. You did have opportunities; Mrs. Smitherwinky wanted to adopt you after your father died.”

“That silly old twit of a woman,” sneered K.O. Bolt.

“She’s kind hearted and caring. She’s taken wonderful care of Martin.”

“Really? My father told me about the people of Derry Dell, all of them and how they treated him. How they ruined his life.”

“No, Kimmie, that’s what he chose to believe. He had a choice. He could have turned his life around even after he hurt Leonora and the mine closed. But he chose revenge instead and it killed him.”

“Exactly,” hissed K.O. Bolt, “and that’s what I choose, revenge.”

“Mr. Bolt?” Milly took a couple of steps forward, “you don’t have to choose revenge. You could choose to be part of this family, to be part of Derry Dell. You just have to let the past go. What happened so many years ago, no one can undo. The past is making you do things that won’t give you a future, or not a very pleasant one.”

For a second, no, perhaps only a nanosecond K.O. Bolt may have actually considered Milly’s words. Some of the steeliness left his eyes and the corners of his mouth softened, just a little. But then, unlike the Grinch whose heart swells with love, K.O. Bolt’s heart plunged deeper into a dark evil pit.

“No, you’re all going to be Gnomes. I should get a handsome price for adult Gnomes, never tried it before. I’ll sell you all as a family package.” Kimmerigian Orlando Bolt threw his head back and laughed.

**

No one could say for sure how the actual sequence of events played out because they seemed to happen almost simultaneously.

First of all Lillian's phone rang, or burped, as the case may be. Not a delicate little burp either, but one of those long protracted kind of burps that you get if you drink a carbonated drink too fast. It was a little hard to hear because of K.O. Bolt's maniacal laughing, but Lillian heard it. She glared at Darwin who, in spite of the circumstances, giggled furiously. The phone was in the Solomon's knapsack, at the back. So Lillian cautiously moved behind Solomon to reach for it. When she pulled out the offending burping device and flipped it open, Lillian also pulled out a fuming Wilda Mastodon. "Hello? Hello?" Said a voice, but Lillian quickly snapped shut the phone.

The Fairies still trapped in the pine-gum net and guarded by two Trolls, saw her and let out a collective "Wilda!" The slight fluttering of their wings caused the pine-gum net, which wasn't really heavy, just sticky, to elevate off the floor a little bit. This surprised the two Trolls who then proceeded to start their peculiar rocking motion back and forth.

At almost the same instant the elevator doors from the cells below slid open and out pawed the two dragon-dogs pulling Gladly behind them. He was holding what looked like a small plastic tube. Behind him, dressed in their rescue gear, were Martin, the Coach and Stink. They leapt from the elevator flinging handfuls of Pixie dust everywhere. Upon spying the dragon-dogs some of the Pixies scattered and the Fairies, net and all, flew up to the high ceiling of the foyer like a balloon that had been let go. They were creating clouds of Fairy dust, which made them and the net seem to disappear. Wilda Mastodon had fluttered up to the net and was furiously trying to saw through it with a small knife.

The dust made her seem to disappear too. Excess dust was falling down on the Trolls below. More Trolls came wobbling out of the study. Seeing what was going on and not seeing the other Trolls, made them start their back and forth motion.

K.O. Bolt stopped laughing and looked around seemingly puzzled. He quickly gave the Gnomes the cue to stack. The Gnomes tried to stack themselves, but because they were affected by the Pixie dust, they were mistaking Pixies for other Gnomes. One Gnome had made a stack of five Pixies that were weaving precariously on top of him. K.O. finally saw Gladly and the dragon-dogs. At first he glared at Gladly. Then he saw the tube in Gladly's hand and he blanched. K.O. struggled against the tangled mess of Gnomes and Pixies to get to Gladly and the dogs. Gladly, on the other hand, was purposely staying out of the fray and he guided the dogs first into the great room and then to the right. He was going to take them out the back door according to the plan they'd quickly devised in the elevator. K.O. was keeping an eye on Gladly's progress.

"Stink," yelled Martin, "get the kids and Stan and Milly. The Coach and I will keep flinging Pixie dust, at least its creating confusion!"

Stinknose reached into the left pocket on his jacket and pulled out the small bag of pure Fairy dust. He narrowly missed being bowled over by a Gnome. The Corrigan children, along with Stan and Milly had backed themselves up against the far foyer wall. They all looked bewildered and a little bit scared. Stink scurried up to them.

"Come with me!" Stink hollered, as loud as he could in his own tinkly way.

The noise was a cacophony of squeaky Pixie shouts and low, grumbling Gnome grunts. It seemed like everyone was either yelling, or bellowing.

Stink stuck close to the wall and waved for the rest of them to follow behind him.

As they got closer to the front door, Stink opened the small bag of Fairy dust. “Okay, as soon as I dust you, I want you to make a bee-line for the front door. It’s not locked. Go out and go left, across the lawn and into the garage. We’ll meet up with you there. Ready?”

They all nodded. Stan went first, then Milly, followed by Darwin and Lillian. Solomon was last. Just as Stink held the bag up to dust Solomon, a Troll who had unfortunately gathered momentum, came rolling and tumbling towards Stink.

“Stink! Look out!” As the words left Solomon’s lips, Stink was blind-sided by the Troll. He managed to fling a few flecks of dust in Solomon’s direction but then the rest of the white bag of pure Fairy dust sailed up in the air rotating top over bottom sprinkling the Fairy dust over the entire front foyer. You could still hear all the squeaking and grunting, but everyone had disappeared.

“Martin, where are you?” The Coach hollered.

“Over by the elevator Coach, where are you?”

“By the stairs, I’ll head back towards you. Ouch! I think a Gnome just stepped on my foot!”

“Be careful,” yelled Martin, “stay close to the walls.”

It seemed like an eternity, but the Coach finally made it back to the open doors of the elevator.

“Okay Martin, I’m standing right in front of the elevator.”

“Great Coach, I’m just going to reach out and find you.”

All of a sudden there was a long, low rumble. Whether it was intuition, a sense of impending doom, or the mix of the Pixie and Fairy dust, but Martin suddenly saw a flash

of the Coaches shiny jogging suit. It appeared to be falling into the elevator. Martin grabbed and held on tight. The elevator shuddered a couple of times and in the blink of an eye fell down the elevator shaft. The rumbling continued for a few seconds and then stopped. White dust coughed its way up the now elevator-less shaft.

“Whew,” breathed the Coach, “that was a close one.”

“There goes K.O.’s engineering marvel. Speaking of which, we’d better get out to the garage and meet everyone, I really want to get out of here.”

“Me too, I’ve had enough excitement for the last couple of days.”

“Here grab my hand. I’m going to stick to the walls and work our way around to the front door. It might take a little longer, but at least we won’t be tripping over a Pixie or Gnome that we can’t see.”

“Hold hands?”

“Coach, we’re invisible.”

“Oh, yeah.”

It took Martin and the Coach a few minutes but they got out the front door and raced to the garage.

**

The garage, like the rest of the Pruitt house, was quite formidable in size. It had the same matching stone exterior as the house, over-sized garage doors and parking for six vehicles.

Martin and the Coach slunk along one side, and across the back. Gladly had told them there was a storage door about half way along that let you into the main garage. Martin and the Coach let themselves in through the door and crouched down below the

level of the counters. There were bright lights on inside the garage. Martin cautiously peered over the counter and saw what he guessed was the Gnominator machine and also a large 18 wheeler truck. The garage was that big.

“Where’s Gladly?” The Coach whispered.

“I don’t know,” said Martin with a trace of concern in his voice. “He was supposed to meet us here.”

“Punctuality was never his strong point.”

The Coach and Martin whirled around. Standing in the doorway to the garage, still a bit shimmery from the Fairy dust and obviously on his Troll platform, was K.O. Bolt.

“Delighted that you can join us. I was just going to provide my good friends here with a demonstration of my Gnominator. Please join us.”

K.O. Bolt moved out of the doorway to let a defeated looking Martin and Coach into the main garage. Lined up along the wall each guarded by a Gnome were Stan, Milly, Lillian, Solomon, Darwin and Stink. In a cage next to them cowering and clutching each other were Henry and Gavin Flatchet.

“Now let’s see, who wants to go first? No fighting now, everyone gets a turn.”

Martin scanned the rest of the garage. No Gladly and no dragon-dogs.

Humming to himself, K.O. Bolt started flicking dials and flipping switches on his machine. The machine wasn’t large in comparison to the garage, but it was large enough. It sort of looked like an electrical transformer that you find scattered around cities and neighbourhoods, but it also had a long glass-like tube with coiled wires in it that made it look like something out of a bad science-fiction movie. K.O. Bolt turned his attention

back to his captives.

“No takers? Everyone being polite about not going first? Oh dear, you’re going to make me chose, aren’t you? Okay,” a wicked grin crept over his face, “I chose you!”

He pointed at Milly Boughtom.

“No!” Martin screamed. “You can’t, take me, please take me.”

“Or me,” shouted the Coach.

“K.O. don’t do this,” Stan said calmly, “if anyone should go first it should be me.”

“All this gallantry, it’s so, uhm, what’s the word, oh yes, touching.” He motioned for the Trolls to push him over in front of everyone. “Where was my touching gallantry? Where was anyone caring about me, hmmm?”

“Mr. Bolt,” Milly said sadly, “you have to let the past go.”

“K.O. please think about the future,” pleaded Martin.

“But it doesn’t sound like I have much of a future, does it?”

“Maybe not, but Milly does have a future, as a mother.”

“What?” K.O. nearly toppled off his platform. He looked shocked. So did everyone else.

“It’s true. Milly came back to Derry Dell to be with family, because she’s having a baby. You’re part of that family, indirectly, a, a,” Martin fumbled for words, “a step-uncle or second cousin or something.”

Stan was audibly sobbing. Everyone else was doing that fast kind of breathing you do, just before you burst into tears.

“Okay, that’s it. I’ve heard enough.” There was a rattling of chains and Gladly

Yarble stepped out from behind the Gnominator holding the dragon-dogs. “It’s over K.O.” said Gladly. “I’ve gone along with you because I really thought I might get my brothers back. I guess deep down inside I knew it would never happen, but I had hope. Now I know that they’re permanent garden ornaments somewhere. So, pull the plug on the machine or I turn the dogs back.” Gladly pulled the wizard stick out of his pocket.

“No, no,” begged K.O. “don’t turn them back, they’re the only creatures on earth that have any kind of affection for me.”

“Are you kidding me?” Asked Gladly incredulously. “These people have just offered you the family that you claim to have wanted all these years. You really don’t get it do you?”

“I’ll build another machine. I’ll trace your brothers through all my records. I’ll restore them for you.”

“No. Let them go.” Gladly hooked the dragon-dog leashes onto a steel pole and took the wizard stick in both hands.

“No, please,” blubbered K.O.

“All it takes it one little snap and then one little slurp for Gus and Stench. Let everyone go.” Gladly made a move as if he was going to snap the wizard stick.

“Okay, okay.” K.O. snapped his fingers and the Gnomes moved away from Lillian, Solomon and the rest.

“The Flatchet boys too.”

K.O. pushed a button on the machine and the cage door swung open. Henry and Gavin raced over and embraced the Coach.

“Good. Now erase the Gnomiator program from the drive of the machine.”

K.O. stepped down from his Troll platform. He slowly walked over to the computer console that sat in front of the machine. He typed a few keys and then hesitated.

“Do it,” Gladly said sternly.

K.O. sighed and pushed a key. A delete question prompt appeared on the screen. He hit another key. ‘Are you sure?’ popped up on the screen. K.O. clicked yes. A few seconds later ‘program deleted’ flashed onto the screen. K.O. collapsed onto the keyboard sobbing.

“Well, that’s just about it then,” Gladly said as he put the wizard stick back in his pocket. “I know I’ve behaved badly, but I really want to thank all of you, especially Lillian and Solomon for your hospitality. I don’t know, I know I’m a Pixie and we take forever to grow up it seems, but maybe I’m finally growing up, just a bit.”

Lillian walked over to Gladly. K.O. continued to sob at the keyboard. “What are you going to do Gladly?”

“Yeah,” said the Coach as he untangled himself from the Flatchet boys, who still looked shell-shocked. “I could always use extra help at the recreation centre.”

“Thank you. I mean it.” Gladly looked up at the Coach and Lillian, he was blinking furiously. “I, uh, I didn’t think anyone cared.”

“So what are you going to do?” The Coach said as he quickly wiped his nose with the sleeve of his jogging suit.

“Ewh,” thought Lillian, “but wait a minute, the Coach is an old softie! He was going to cry.”

“I’m going to stick with this guy,” Gladly jerked his thumb at K.O. Bolt, who was now sitting up and rather grossly snuffling and sniffing.

“Really?” Lillian said rather shocked. She hadn’t noticed Milly quietly come up beside her and the Coach.

“Everyone needs a friend, don’t they Gladly,” Milly said gently. “I don’t think we’ve met, I’m Milly Boughtom.” She extended her hand and a blushing, but obviously very pleased Gladly took it.

“He needs more supervision than friendship,” Gladly shrugged, “but maybe I can offer both and see what happens.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out the wizard stick. Except it wasn’t the wizard stick. It was a cheap glow-light. “I’ve got the real one, but I think I’ll use this for insurance. Thanks Coach.” Maybe Gladly really was growing up. He smiled and nodded at Milly, the Coach and Lillian and then turned and went back to K.O. Bolt.

“Okay Bolt, time to go. Get the Gnomes to load the truck. I’ll get the dragon-dogs.”

Within fifteen minutes the truck was loaded and heading out the circular driveway of the Pruitt house. K.O. Bolt, his dragon-dogs, his Gnominator machine, his Trollerizer machine (which had turned out to be the unreliable proto-type for the Gnominator), his Gnomes, his Trolls and Gladly Yarble were gone.

**

Everyone walked back to the house except the Flatchet boys. They were anxious to get home to a hot meal and a warm bed. On the walk back Lillian apologized profusely to Martin for doubting him. Martin took it in stride and thanked them for using his detective agency, such as it was. When they got back to the house they realized that there was surprisingly little damage done to the interior given the chaos that had ensued.

Yes, the pine-gum net was still by the door and there was the odd Troll or Gnome shoe on the floor and there was a bit of debris from the tunnel's imploding, but since most of the furniture in the house was already covered the clean-up would be minimal. The study was a bit of a mess since the Trolls had used many of the books to support the monitors, but that too was minor. It was also not a surprise that not a Pixie remained and undoubtedly the Fairies were getting a boot-camp lecture from Wilda somewhere.

Lillian, Solomon, Darwin, Martin, Milly, the Coach, Stan and Stink were all very quiet. Everyone seemed to be caught up in their own thoughts.

"I can't believe it," thought Martin. "I've got a family, a real family and friends. And maybe I really can be a detective, despite my garrulous office. I liked this adventure and I think I might have some detectives in training with the Corrigan kids. Stink will be invaluable. I think I should volunteer at the recreation centre too, Coach could use the support."

"Wow, better than the Prankster Pros, I'd say," thought the Coach. "I can't wait until I give Tony the details on this one. My guess is that those Flatchet boys will be doing a lot more studying and basketball and a lot less video gaming."

Stink had crawled into one of the sheet-covered chairs. "Such discontent, such discord, even among Pixies and Fairies," he thought. "Oh dear, I do have my work cut out for me." He took the tiny beetle out of his pocket and put it on the chair beside him.

Stan had wandered over to the large windows in the great room that overlooked Derry Dell. He looked down at the twinkling lights that were starting to come on as the sun set. "I'm home. I think I'm really home and I'm going to be a grandfather. I love you Leonora and I miss you." A single tear ran down his cheek.

Milly came up beside her father; she put her arm around his waist and wondered what he was thinking. She noticed the tear on his face. “He’s thinking about Leonora,” she thought. She stood quietly for a moment. “In some ways, it’s like I never left. I guess part of this town has always been part of me. Maybe we can bring back that sense of community that Miles so wanted for Derry Dell. I think Chris is going to love this place. I can’t wait to open my shop here.”

“Whoa,” Solomon thought as he leaned over the empty elevator shaft and stared into the darkness below him. “This has been way more awesome than that Gnomes and Trolls game. Actually,” he continued thinking, “this has beaten just about thing I’ve ever played. I wonder if we could do it again next weekend.”

Darwin sauntered into the study. All the computers were gone. “I guess that K.O. Dolt guy packed everything up,” he grumped inwardly. “Why do I have the feeling that I’ve missed some kind of adventure?” He was pensive for a moment and then shrugged. “Oh well. I can’t wait to tell the guys about the amazing banister here and how I almost turned into a Troll. Or was it a Gnome. Rats, they’ll never believe me anyways.”

Lillian sat at the top of the enormous and elegant staircase hugging her knees. “How could some people be so cruel to other people?” She contemplated. “I had no idea that Martin was so lonely. I’m sure that most of the people in Derry Dell didn’t either. But he didn’t choose to take out his loneliness on the rest of the world, like K.O. Bolt. Why would Bolt choose to live in the past? All that does is prolong the hurt and you can’t face the future if you’re looking backwards.” Lillian took a deep breath. The kind of deep breath you take when you don’t want to cry.

Brappa, brappa, brappa, brap, brappa, brappa, brappa, brap, brap, brap,brap brap.

It was Lillians' phone playing 'The Chicken Dance song' in burps. She flipped open the phone.

"Lillian, honey, its mom!" Lillian froze.

"Hi! Mom! You're home?"

"Oh no dear, we won't be back until tomorrow morning, just as we planned. I just called to see how things were going."

"Fine mom, peachy!"

"Good to hear. I did phone earlier but you must have been listening to some new garbage band with your friends."

"Uh mom, I think you mean grunge band."

"Yes dear, whatever they're called, but they certainly weren't very musical."

"No," thought Lillian, "musical would not be word that I'd use to describe the frenzied chaos earlier."

"Well, we're fine mom."

"I knew you would be sweetie, you're my wonderfully responsible daughter."

Lillian teared up, just a little.

"I just phoned to tell you that in honour of Darwin's big birthday tomorrow, I've ordered three big pizza's from Pizza Pie Palace to be delivered in the next twenty minutes, so invite a few friends over and enjoy. Don't be too late though, school tomorrow."

"Uh, wow, thanks mom."

"See all of you in the morning. Big smooches to the boys. We miss you, bye."

Lillian snapped her phone shut. "Miss you too, mom," she thought. "Maybe she

does think I'm responsible." She sat for a moment and then stood up.

"Hey guys, pizza, our place, Leafy Glen Drive, be there or...just be there!"