

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Milly's Story

Milly Boughtom was almost 27 years old when she departed Derry Dell. She waited until Martin's eighteenth birthday to leave. She didn't tell Martin that she was leaving but she had arranged everything with the bank, the lawyers, Mrs. Smitherwinky and a chorus of other women from Derry Dell who'd agreed to look out for Martin's best interests. Mrs. Smitherwinky was to keep in touch on a regular basis with Milly, which she did.

"I know I was being selfish Martin, but I couldn't escape the past here and all I was ever going to be was that poor Boughtom girl. I took the job in the library because it was a quiet place to hide. I could dress like a librarian and dissolve into the shelves of books."

Milly took a sip of her tea and then continued.

"It was probably one event that made me decide to finally leave. I'd worked a little late at the library one evening and instead of taking my usual route home along Main Street; I cut through some of the back streets. It meant I had to pass by the Spiffy Jiffy Bar. But I thought it was still pretty early in the evening, so I'd be alright. Not so. Warnock Bladderbog was sitting right out front. He had his usual hangers-on with him, Doorang Huffnutter, Joe Bob Klemper and Smarmly Yutzinger. They'd all been creeps in high school and nothing had changed. I even crossed to the other side of the street, but it didn't matter. Once they saw me coming up the street they started their usual taunts. 'Hey, Smelly Bottom, are you as looney as your crazy mother?' 'How's your weird

brother, oh yeah, Smartin Bottom.’ I started to run but that just encouraged them. ‘Oh I know, she’s running off to chase butterflies or maybe talk to the Fairies in the backyard.’ When I got home I called Mrs. Smitherwinky and asked her to meet me at the lawyer’s office, Snookum and Ratchet, the next morning. You’d turned 18 the week before, so I just handed everything over in trust for you. I took a small amount of money to get by on and then I just left.”

“Whew,” whistled Coach Dribble, “I’d forgotten all about those jerks. That ratty bar closed years ago and all of those low-life’s are now either making mail-bags or license plates for the government.”

“Oh, Mil, I had no idea what you were going through. I guess I was living in my own little bubble. So what happened next?”

“Well, I went to the city and I got a job, not a great job, actually a horrible job, but it got me some expertise in what I wanted to do.”

“So what was your job? I mean you had a degree in English. Did you write speeches for someone or do some copy editing?”

“Nope!” Laughed Milly. “You’d never be able to guess. I got a job as a cutter at Just Lovely Fashions. Except they weren’t, lovely that is. But I had no cutting skills and no skill working with fabric but all I wanted to do was design fashion. I lasted about 8 months and every night I’d go home and study books on design and marketing. I got books from the library on how fabric is made. I’d haunt fabric stores on the weekends and I filled dozens of sketch books with my ideas.”

“Mil that’s amazing. So what happened after you left your not-so-lovely fashion place.”

“For weeks before I left my job, I’d been scouring the downtown area for a little place to open a shop, I was getting pretty discouraged everything was so expensive. Then one day, after I’d made a wrong turn, I saw a sign in a shop window that said ‘Half-space to rent.’ I was intrigued so I went in. It turned out to be a starving artist who wanted to rent out half of the little shop so he could try and stay in business. I signed on the dotted line and two weeks later I opened ‘Milly’s Clothing Boutique’ which eventually became MCB.”

“Neat!” Martin exclaimed. “So you’ve closed your little shop to move back here. I’m sure we can find a small shop in Derry Dell that you could take over or I know Flora Green is always looking for staff at her store.”

“Yes, that’s right,” chipped in the Coach, “and I can always put something on the bulletin board at the Recreation centre.”

“Thank you both for your offers,” said Milly, chuckling just a little, “but I’m thinking of opening a little shop here, but with a slightly different twist to it.”

Surprisingly it was Stinknose Dewberry who realized the connection between Milly and MCB.

“You’re *the* Milly,” Stink said slowly in his wind-chime voice. “I’ve been trying to figure out why you look familiar.”

Milly blushed. Both Martin and Coach Dribble looked confused. “What do you mean *the* Milly,” asked a puzzled Martin.

“If you read any of the fashion magazines, MCB is one of the hottest, small fashion houses in the world,” explained Stink to a now stunned Coach and Martin. “And you just sold it and walked away from the industry, right?”

“Yes, I did. I’ve got more than I ever need and I want to spend more time with family and I guess nest back into the community here in Derry Dell.”

“I, uh, uhm.” Martin was left speechless. The Coach’s jaw was hanging open.

“Martin, I’d like to stay here with you until my husband arrives next week, if that’s okay with you.”

“I, uh, husband, sure,” fumbled Martin. “You’re married?” He blurted. Martin was again rendered speechless. He finally recovered. “I mean Milly that’s great news! How long have you been married? Where did you meet him? Oh my gosh, what’s his name?”

Milly laughed out loud. “I’m glad you approve Martin! We’ve been married for five years, he was the starving artist on the other side of the shop and his name is Christopher Gregory.”

“Up and coming avant-garde artist, am I right?” Tinkled Stinknose.

“Yes, right again Mr. Dewberry, you must be quite an avid reader of fashion and art magazines,” smiled Milly.

This time Stinknose blushed. “Oh, I like pretty things and both you and your husband make pretty things.”

“Thank you.”

“So what’s the different twist and are you really going to open a shop here in Derry Dell?” The Coach asked in awe.

“Yes, yes, I think so.” Milly turned and smiled warmly at the Coach. “I’m hoping to open a baby shop. I’ve already got some designs for baby clothes worked out.”

“A baby shop, nice idea.” The Coach nodded his head up and down with

approval. Then it hit him. “Are you, I mean, when are you...” the Coach’s voice trailed away as he blushed furiously. The blushing was contagious.

Martin stared at his sister, wide-eyed. “Are you and does that mean...?”

Milly laughed out loud. “Yes Martin, I’m going to have a baby and yes, you are going to be an uncle! There, now you know!”

Huge pools of tears welled up in Martin’s eyes. The Coach was beaming. Stink was grinning from one of his tiny ears to the other.

“I’m getting a family back,” choked out Martin, barely containing himself.

They all stood quietly for a moment, then the Coach coughed.

“Speaking of getting families back, we should get on the trail of Lillian and Solomon. And maybe we can find the Flatchett boys too.”

Martin wiped back the tears before they splashed on his face. “You’re right Coach, we’d better get going. Let’s head back to my office and lay out a plan. We can take the Coach’s van.”

“I can help,” volunteered Milly. “I’m really good with computers and I can do research to beat the band.”

They all headed for the front door. Martin grabbed the maps off the table, yanked a grubby looking knapsack from the closet but then stopped abruptly.

“Mil, I almost forgot, you were just about to tell me something when the Coach and Stink arrived.”

“It can wait Martin.” A look of sadness returned to Milly’s face.

Martin missed the change in her expression. “Sure, we can talk more later.”

Martin spun around and headed outside.

“Coach, where’s your van?” Martin looked at the empty street.

“Uh, a block away from your office,” mumbled an embarrassed Coach, “we ran out of gas, that’s why we had to run up here and were all out of breath.”

“We can take my car. I rented it to drive here,” said Milly as she motioned them over to an elegant, sleek black car in the driveway.

The Coach let out a long admiring whistle before he jumped into the back seat.

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Milly pulled the sleek black car up to the curb in front of Martin’s office.

Everyone jumped out of the car except the Coach. He lingered for a moment stroking the smooth leather on the seats of the car.

“Yikes, Martin, please tell me that Dirk Neigh did your sign!”

“Well, er, yes he did.”

“Thanks goodness,” said Milly as she continued to squint up at the Fairy Inspection Agency sign, “you don’t need two colour-blind, never get it right’ painters in the same town. Good old Dirk.”

Martin unlocked the door to his office. “Uhm, he painted the office inside too,” he said as he opened the door and let Milly glide through. She silently took in Martin’s office, turning her head to look at each wall.

“Gosh he’s such a good painter. But you know Martin,” Milly turned back to her brother, “on the up-side, if I open my baby boutique right next door, I want a big, bright yellow sign, and side by side we’d be two of the brightest places on the street!”

“That sounds like a great idea!” Martin grinned back at his sister.

“Okay people, enough chit-chat, we’ve got kids to find!” The Coach barreled

through the door. It was difficult for him to not try and take charge. Stinknose trailed in after him, clutching all the maps and documents that Martin had prepared the day before.

Milly bent down and took the maps and documents from Stinknose. He looked up at her with a silly grin on his face. He was obviously fascinated by Martin's lovely sister. Milly smiled back and then proceeded to spread out the maps and documents on Martin's large desk. She graciously pulled up one of the chairs for Stinknose to stand on, which made him blush. They all gathered around the desk, ready to get down to business.

"As far as I can tell from these maps there is only one real entrance to the entire mine property," said Martin, as he moved his finger over the map and down the road leading out of town. "But it looks like it's well hidden by a double-back in the road."

The Coach and Stinknose were nodding in agreement as they looked closely at the map as well. "And the problem is," said the Coach, "that right about here," he pointed to the double-back, "it's really overgrown and hard to find the original entrance."

Martin stood up and looked at the Coach and Stink. "Do you think you could find it again Coach?"

"It's going to be tough. This map is similar to the one we saw this morning, but I think there are some subtle differences that I can't quite put my finger on." The Coach leaned over and looked at the map again. He took a deep breath in through puckered lips. "But yeah, we can give it a go." He let his breath out and one big whoosh.

Martin, Milly and the Coach focused intently on the map.

"Aren't we forgetting something?" tinkled Stink.

"Mmm, what?" Was Martin's mumbled reply.

"My Dewberry device," said Stink as he placed it on the desk and shoved it as far

as he could reach into the middle. “Not only can we use it to track Gladly, but don’t forget it acts sort of like a Geiger-counter for pixie dust and fairy dust. And since I think he used both this morning we should be able to get a reading.”

“Of course Stink, this is brilliant! I’m sorry I forgot.”

“Me too,” nodded the Coach.

Milly picked up the Dewberry and ran her fingers over the tiny key-board on its front. “How close do you have to be to get a reading on pixie and fairy dust?”

“A thousand meters should do it and I figure if we can drive slowly past the area where the Coach and I think we were this morning, we should be able to pinpoint where the entrance is. Don’t forget, Gladly was not far down the road when he used probably both kinds of dust. My device should give us a pretty accurate reading. And my bugging device should help us pinpoint where Lillian and Solomon are.”

“What do you mean should? Isn’t your device pretty exact?” Martin asked as he picked up the small Dewberry device.

Stink hung his head and said sheepishly, “well I have a few bugs to work out.” He gave a faint giggle, “no pun intended.”

“What kind of bugs?”

“Uhm, the beetles have a habit of kind of going their own way. I’ve thought of putting them in small containers, but then they’d be trapped with no-way of escaping. So I’ve been relying on them staying in one place or on someone long enough for me to find where they are.”

“I see,” said Martin slowly.

“But even if they drop off someone or move around a little bit, they’re usually

within a few hundred meters of what you're trying to track."

Milly could see that Stink was embarrassed. "Is it possible that your little tiger-beetle friend is still on Gladly?"

"Oh quite possible!" Stink beamed up at Milly. "I did manage to put him into the front pocket of his jacket and he wouldn't move around too much if he detected any kind of movement."

Milly looked over at Martin and the Coach, "maybe if we get started right now we'll have a better chance with the Dewberry tracking device."

"Right," said the Coach, rubbing his hands together, "well come on team, let's get our gear together and find those kids!"

"Well I guess we could try," Martin said, somewhat unenthusiastically. "We can use these maps and keep comparing it to the information from Stink's device. That should at least put us in the ballpark."

Milly quickly gathered up the maps and handed them to her brother, "come on Martin, I think you'll be able to pinpoint the mine entrance pretty quickly." She smiled at her brother, "and while the three of you are off being rescuers, I'll see what other kind of information I can gather on our friend K.O. Bolt! Leave me those supposed contracts from the game. I've seen many a contract in my business and my guess is that there is some loophole he's forgotten about. Oh, and Coach, I suggest you put some gas in your van."

The Coach nodded sheepishly and then all three of them walked out the door of the Fairy Inspection Agency and headed down the street in the direction of Nitlint's Garage to get a can of gas.