

A Season of Happiness



the wonderful world
of Story-Telling

MOONBERRY PIE



MP76

www.aseasonofhappiness.com

STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE THE AMAZING ROLLER GHOSTER Part One

“Come on, Danny,” Lucy called from the hallway. “It’s time to go.” She walked through the open door of her brother’s bedroom to find him sitting on the floor reading a comic. Well, *reading* was probably the wrong word because Danny was still pretty young and hadn’t learned to read yet. He had, however, already been told the story when Lucy had read it out loud before; and as he looked at the pictures he could remember most of what went on. This was a particular favourite of his about Starlight’s and Moonshine’s Quest for the Golden Gastropod; and as it was in three parts he had all of them. Standing with hands on hips, Lucy tried again: “Come ON, Danny,” she urged impatiently. “The others are waiting in the car.”

Danny scowled at her. “All-*RIGHT!* You don’t have to be so crabby.” Rolling up the comics, he stuffed them into a backpack.

“Why are you taking them with you?” asked his sister.

“To read in the car,” he explained, his tone suggesting he thought it should be obvious, even to a girl. “You know how boring car trips are, and it takes ages to get anywhere.” He had a sudden thought. “Have you got your Moonberry Pie?”

Lucy frowned. “We’re only going to the fair. Why would I need it?”

“Just in case,” he replied. “Mine’s in my bag, and I bet Granddad’s got his. Always be prepared, he said, ‘cos you never know what might happen.”

Lucy groaned, rolled her eyes and tutted. “I’ll go and fetch it, okay?” With a toss of the head, she strutted out.

Despite the journey to the fairground being reasonably short, Danny kept to his plan and looked through the pictures in his comics. He was on the back seat of the car between Lucy and their grandfather, Joshua; and both couldn’t help glancing at whichever page of the comic was open; all three re-living the events of the story. Then they were approaching the gates. Danny happened to look up and noticed a big sign. “What’s that say?” he asked.

“It seems they’ve got a new ride,” said Joshua.

“The Amazing Roller Ghoster,” Lucy added.

Once the car had been parked, the family started out to explore what the fair had to offer. There were the usual stalls selling show-bags, and numerous ice-cream vans, others with all sorts of food like burgers and hot chips. As for the rides, there were plenty of them including a carousel, the Ferris wheel and, of course, the dodgems. “Who fancies an ice cream?” asked their father. He had imagined Danny would jump at the chance, but was rather surprised with the boy’s response.

“Not now. I want to have a go on the ‘Mazing Roller Ghoster,” declared Danny.

This was where they went, initially just to have a look. It was quite impressive: a long metal structure supporting a rail track that snaked through the fairground. It went up and down, straight and level for a bit, twisting slightly in places first one way then the other. The Ghoster name came from images of white spooks and grisly demons that hovered and floated beside the track somehow, waiting to swoop on the people sitting in cars as they passed by. Perhaps the most baffling feature was towards the end of the ride. The railway itself appeared to finish at one point; except it didn't really, because there was a continuing track high in the air that curved steeply back down to the ground. A tall column of steel rose up to meet this last piece of track. Surrounded by more ghosts and a little higher than the top of the column was some kind of machine from which hung four cables extending down to where the straight track along the ground seemed to end.

Danny was staring up at the column, his mouth open in awe. "What's that for, Granddad?" he asked.

"I think we'll find out in a minute," replied Joshua. "There's a car coming along the track towards it."

They were all close enough to see the faces of the four people in the car. Three of them seemed quite relieved, maybe figuring that this was the end of a really hairy ride. One, however, must have known something that the others didn't. The teenage boy had a sparkling look of excitement and anticipation on his face, presumably for what he knew was about to happen. It did, slowly at first. The car came to a halt between the dangling cables, two on either side. The ghosts at the top of the column slid down the cables and began prancing around the Roller-Ghoster riders. A young girl in the car screamed and flapped her hands; a man beside her gasped; while the boy who knew what to expect thrust a fist in the air and yelled out: "YES-SS!" The car jerked suddenly and began to rise as the cables lifted it along with the piece of rail track on which it had stopped.

"Hey, how neat is that?" chirped Danny.

"Erm... maybe," said an unsure Lucy.

The car continued rising, the ghosts kept prancing. Eventually reaching the top of the column, as soon as the piece of track that the cables were holding was in line with the next bit of track, the car lurched forward and was on its final ride. Down it zoomed, gathering speed where the curved railway was at its steepest. The faces of the people in the car were too distant to be seen, but one could imagine that most with the exception of the teenage boy were pretty scared; especially when they were on the last run of track and it looked like they were going to smash into the wall at the end. Amazingly, the car braked quickly but smoothly and came to a standstill a mere metre from the wall.

Lucy let out the breath she had been holding. Danny had a huge pretty-please smile on his face as he turned to his father and asked: "Can we have a go now, Dad?" There was no reply, so the boy tried again: "Mum?" After much pleading and reassurances that it was just a ride and nothing was likely to go wrong, Danny was granted his wish.

Because small children had to be accompanied by an adult, his father agreed to go with him. There was another condition – no bags or packages to be taken on board. Danny handed his backpack to Lucy and warned: "Don't you dare lose it!" Casting her a severe frown, he walked with his father to the Amazing Roller Ghoster ticket office, turning occasionally to look back at his sister, and in particular to make sure she still had his backpack.

Each Roller-Ghoster car only had four seats, and two young ladies waiting at the barrier were first in line. They were about to step into the car when Danny asked them if he and his dad could sit in the front. They looked at each other with grins on their faces. One said: "Go for it, little buddy. We're just along for the ride." And they both laughed.

Lucy, her grandfather and her mother had walked back to sit on a wooden bench with a table facing the main feature, the metal column. Joshua couldn't help noticing the looks of concern on the faces of the other two staring up at the lofty tower and said: "Stop worrying. I'm sure everything will be fine. They're quite safe."

And they were; to begin with. The car Danny and his father were in could be seen heading off in the opposite direction along a straight track which curved in a wide loop before starting on the ups and downs. After another series of turns and twists they were coming back towards the tower. As the car paused between the cables, Danny saw his family watching and waved excitedly, while his father tried a smile that wasn't very convincing. The two young ladies in the back seemed to be enjoying the ride and were laughing still. "I told you they'd be fine," said Joshua.

Lucy leaned close to her grandfather and whispered quietly: "It's the next bit I'm not that happy about." She felt his reassuring squeeze on her arm, was about to say something, but caught her breath instead. The cables had started to withdraw, the ghosts were sliding down them, and car was on the rise. Up and up it went followed intently by three pairs of eyes on the ground. Almost at the top, something unexpected happened. There was a grating, grinding noise and the car lurched to a halt. A flash of electricity spat from the machine hauling the cables. At the same instant the ghosts disappeared; even the ones waiting alongside the tracks had gone. "I knew it," rasped Lucy under her breath. "It's Danny – he's a jinx."

Joshua would have replied, but his eyes were glued to the suspended car. It hung there, immobile; just for a moment. Then there was another spark and a fizzing from inside the machine at the top, smoke too. With a long groan the upper framework of the tower bent slightly, setting the dangling car swaying from side to side. Lucy was horrified, as was her mother. The girl managed to compose herself and declared hastily: "We have to do something, Granddad. We need Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine, right now!"

She hurriedly opened Danny's backpack and fished out the comics. "There might be a problem, Lucy," said Joshua, and he went on to explain: "To start with, Danny's been the one to make first contact by putting his hand on a picture in the comic; but, of course, he's stuck up there in the car. Even if one of us can do the hand-thing and speak to Starlight; the way I see it is we'll need her ship here to rescue all of them in the car. I'm not sure we can bring the ship from comic book world into the real world."

"We did it with Lord Nuff-Nuff's Christmas tree," Lucy reminded him.

Joshua pondered the matter and shook his head. "The ship is much bigger – maybe too big."

"Well, we have to try!" she insisted.

Her mother had been focussed on the car dangling high above her, vaguely listening to the conversation between her father and daughter. With a scowl of irritation she snapped: "We should be getting help, but all you two seem to be doing is talking a lot of nonsense."

Joshua took hold of his daughter's hand and tried to reassure her: "There isn't time to explain, Margaret. We *are* going to get help, trust me." Turning to Lucy, he said: "Open the comic to the first page at the very beginning of the story where they

are all on the ship.” He waited for the girl to comply. “Now, place your hand on it and speak to Starlight.”

All five of the characters in the picture had been perfectly still as would be expected, until Lucy put her hand on the comic and spoke; then they sprang to life. “Hello, Lucy,” said Starlight. “This is a surprise – it’s usually Danny.”

“Danny’s one of the reasons it’s me, Captain,” said the girl, speaking to the comic-book picture. “He’s in the Roller-Ghoster car and it’s broken down. Now he and Dad are stuck high in the air and in big trouble.”

“There’s no choice, Starlight,” said the Quest leader Dib-Dob. “As our friends in the real world have helped us, we should go and rescue Danny and his father.”

His nephew Lord Nuff-Nuff sounded disappointed as he chimed in: “I thought we were supposed to be going on The Quest for the Golden Gastropod...?”

“You really are selfish sometimes,” grumbled his giant penguin butler Henshaw. “Actually, I’ll rephrase that – not sometimes: *most* of the time.”

Knowing how the rivalry between the two was about to develop into a long argument, Joshua butted in: “Will you please just listen. The Quest is a story that’s already been written and it will still happen for you eventually. Right now we desperately need help, and quickly.” He paused momentarily to let that sink in. When he continued, it was with a question: “Captain Starlight, do you think it would be possible to Moonberry-Pie your ship and yourselves to here in the real world? We did it with the Christmas tree, but I’m worried the ship might be too big.”

It was as if the characters in the picture had suddenly frozen again because none of them moved; then Colonel Moonshine jammed fists on his hips, puffed out his chest and declared: “Nothing’s impossible. I say we give it a go. Thinking caps on, everyone – we need ideas, preferably Huge ones.”

They talked it over and thought they might be able to use the way they had Moonberry-Pied the Christmas tree to the real world. “Don’t forget, though,” Henshaw reminded them, “The tree was much smaller and six of us were holding it. At the moment, we only have five onboard.”

“Trust you to look on the black side,” Lord Nuff-Nuff sneered.

Lucy ignored him and spoke to Joshua: “The two of us can Moonberry-Pie to the ship now, Granddad; then we’ll be seven in all. Will that be enough?”

Loud cracks resounded from above as the two cables holding the front of the Roller-Ghoster car snapped. The car dropped a little but hung on. Joshua released the breath he had been holding. “There’s only one way to find out. Have you got your cookie?” he asked. When Lucy nodded he said: “Right, ready...?”

They both called out: “Moonberry Pie!” and were flying through the rainbow sky. The next instant they found themselves on the deck of Starlight’s ship. “Welcome, Lucy and Joshua,” said Moonshine, “Now, there’s no time to lose. Spread out everyone and hold onto the sides of the ship; cookie in the other hand, of course. Have you all got yours?” Each nodded that they had; except for Nuff-Nuff who just grunted. The Colonel took a deep breath and whispered to himself: “*This is going to be SO HUGE,*” then he commanded: “After three – one... two... three.”

Together, the seven holding the sides of the ship called out as one: “MOONBERRY PIE!” Then they waited. Something happened, but not what was expected. The upper part of the ship including the rigging and balloons seemed to dim and become transparent, but only for a few seconds before returning to the way they usually were.

“Disaster!” declared Captain Starlight. “How can we ever rescue Danny, now?”