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MOONBERRY PIE



MP77

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STARLIGHT AND MOONSHINE THE AMAZING ROLLER GHOSTER Part Two

The problem, you may remember, was that the attempt to Moonberry-Pie Captain Starlight's ship to the real world hadn't worked; so, Danny, his Dad and the two young ladies in the Roller-Ghoster car were in danger of falling from a great height.

"The only way is to have more people on board ship," said Moonshine.

"If Danny was here with us it might be enough," said Lucy.

"If he was," put in Henshaw, "We wouldn't have to go and rescue him."

"There you go again," groaned Lord Nuff-Nuff in despair. "Always negative."

"And you're not, I suppose," chided Henshaw.

Joshua held a hand in the air for silence and said: "Danny's not an option, but there is someone who might, just might give us what we need. Stay here, Lucy. I'm going to Moonberry-Pie back to the fairground. With luck, I'll return in a few shakes."

Once the magic words had been said he was gone from the ship, arriving the next second in the fairground of the real world at the exact point that he'd left it.

Something must be understood, here: mostly, when Lucy, Danny or Joshua transport into comic-book world; for them, at least, everything in the real world they have left behind doesn't change. It stays exactly the same until all three have returned. So, because Lucy was still on Starlight's ship, the real world surrounding Joshua was frozen in time, his daughter included.

She was in shock, just sitting on the bench, gazing up at the dangling Roller-Ghoster car high above. In front of her on the table was the Starlight and Moonshine comic which had enabled Joshua and Lucy to enter comic-book world; and next to it was Danny's backpack. Joshua opened the front pocket and was relieved to find the boy's cookie. He had no idea whether what he was about to try would work; he only prayed it would. "Margaret," he said softly, "I don't know if you can hear me, but I hope so. Try to remember back to when you were a child. You used to believe in magic and fairies then. I need you to imagine you are that little girl again."

Joshua paused to watch her face. Although it appeared quite still, he was certain he noticed a slight flicker of her eyes. Taking her hand in his, he continued: "We have to save Danny and Peter, and to do that we need your help. If you are able to, look at the picture in the comic, Margaret. You will see that Lucy is in it. By magic, she has travelled into comic-book world." He watched her face again. The eyes seemed to widen; then her head was coming down, very slowly, and she was

staring at the picture in the comic. Her mouth opened to say something, but no words came out.

Her father nodded. "It would seem that you can still believe," he said. "In a moment, we are both going to join Lucy and the others in the picture." Placing Danny's cookie in the palm of her hand, he closed her fingers over it. "This special cookie will take you there; but there is one more thing you must do to make it happen." Joshua told Margaret about the magic words, repeating them a few times to make sure she understood; careful, though, not to be holding his own cookie. Had he been, the moment he said Moonberry Pie he would have been whisked into comic-book world, leaving his daughter behind.

Thinking there was little more he could do, he said: "I have to know that you can say the words. Not the magic ones though, not yet," he added hastily, "Just something else, anything."

Margaret's head turned to look at him. Her eyes blinked and shivered. Her lips wavered as she whispered: "I'm scared, Dad."

Joshua gave her a reassuring smile. "It will be alright, darling. Trust me. Now, are you ready to say the words?" She nodded. Taking his cookie in one hand, he held his daughter's free hand with the other. "Together, then: after three..."

Lucy, of course knew nothing of what had been happening in the real world; so when not only her grandfather appeared on the deck in front of her, but also her mother, she was totally surprised and finding it hard to believe. "Mum?"

Margaret was bewildered and stood mouth agape, turning on the spot to view her surroundings. "Where am I?" she asked in wonder.

"In comic-book world," said Joshua, "As I said you would be if you believed in magic again."

"I th-think I do," stammered his daughter, "I m-must. But why am I here?"

"To help us save Danny and Dad," Lucy explained. "We need to Moonberry-Pie Captain Starlight's ship to the fairground in the real world; and it will take all of us, as well as you, to make it happen."

Colonel Moonshine gave her a big smile. "Thank you for coming, Margaret." He took her hand and began leading her to the side of the ship.

For some reason known only to herself she seemed surprised that she could actually feel his touch. "How is it that I can feel you holding my hand?" she asked in confusion. "You're supposed to be just a drawing in a picture, but you seem like a real person."

"I *am*," Moonshine confirmed proudly, "Here in comic-book world I am *very* real. So are the rest of our gathering." And he went on to introduce those standing on the deck: "Starlight our Captain, Nuff-Nuff Lord of Gumbyland, his giant penguin butler Henshaw, and Nuff-Nuff's uncle Dib-Dob. Lucy and Joshua you already know; well, of course you do."

Once the introductions were over, Moonshine instructed everyone to take their places around the deck of the ship. Checking that they were all holding on to the side closest to them and had a cookie in the other hand, he called out: "Ready? On three – one... two... three..."

Including a rather confused Margaret, they said in unison: "MOONBERRY PIE!"

There was only a slight delay before the entire ship seemed to fade; and the next second it was sailing through the rainbow sky to arrive at the fairground. Nothing had changed since Joshua and Margaret had left. People remained frozen; the Ferris wheel and carousel were at a standstill; and the Roller-Ghoster car hung

suspended by two cables. Captain Starlight's ship was on the ground supported by its wheels beside the table where the Starlight and Moonshine comic sat open.

Margaret was gazing up from the deck to the dangling car above. "What do we do now?" she asked to anyone and everyone.

"I'll do the blow-up thing, shall I Starlight?" suggested Moonshine. "Then we can go up and rescue Danny and his Dad."

"And don't forget there are two ladies in there as well," Lucy reminded them.

With a few turns of the blow-up wheel, the balloons tied to the ship filled with air and they were on the rise. Up alongside the metal tower they went, but on reaching the top they carried on going. "Let some air out of the balloons, Moonshine," ordered the Captain, "Just a bit at a time until we are level with the Roller-Ghoster car."

Inch by inch the ship dropped until they were right beside the car. Three passengers sat like statues, except for Danny who should have been delighted to see all his friends. Instead, he was less than happy. "You took your time," he complained.

"With that attitude, think yourself lucky we came at all," grated Lucy.

"Now then, Lucy," said Joshua; then to his grandson: "She doesn't mean that, Danny." Turning to face the ship's wheelhouse, he called out: "What now, Captain?"

Starlight had been surveying the scene. "We could attach ropes to the car," she supposed, "But I don't see how we can lower it because it is still fixed to those cables."

"What if we helped the passengers out of the car and onto the deck?" asked Dib-Dob. "The only trouble is that they'd have to jump across the gap, and seeing as they are in some kind of trance, I don't imagine they'd be capable of anything that physical."

Henshaw, however, had an idea: "You know the pirate thing of getting someone to walk the plank - we could do something like that, but in reverse where they walk the plank to the ship rather than off it into the sea."

"What a stupid idea," sneered Nuff-Nuff. "We probably don't even have a plank."

"We do, actually," said Moonshine.'

"Shows how much you don't know, Lord smarty-pants" chirped Henshaw with a smirk.

Nuff-Nuff scowled. "But look at them," he sneered. "Apart from Danny, they can't move. How are we going to get them onboard, carry them?"

"I can talk to them," said Danny. "If you can fetch the plank, Colonel Moonshine, maybe I can get them to move." It didn't take long for Moonshine to bring the plank. With Joshua's help it was slid over the side of the ship until the other end rested on the Roller-Ghoster car's floor. Now it was time for Danny to put his suggestion into practice. Catching hold of his father's arm he gave it a little tug. "Come on, Dad, stand up." His father didn't move.

"Try again, Danny," Lucy called from the side of the ship. "Come on, Dad; you can do it. Stand up." The man remained motionless.

Margaret had been watching and hoping like everyone else. Leaning over the side she looked down, saw how high up they were, glanced back to the plank; then, letting out a huge sigh, made her decision: "I think I can do it, as long as I don't fall off the plank."

"Can't you just call to Dad from here?" asked Lucy.

"Not for what I've got in mind," replied her mother. "I have to hold his hand."

No-one had thought about how dangerous Margaret's suggestion might mean; not until Joshua helped her onto the plank and she was inching her way nervously

towards the Roller-Ghoster car. The closer she came, her extra weight was causing the car to tilt and the cables were groaning. Moonshine's eyes were wide as he called across: "Take it very easy, Margaret – no sudden movements or another cable might break."

Once on the car she sent Danny a comforting smile before turning her attention to her husband. "Come along, Peter," she said softly. "You've been sleepwalking again." The man's head turned towards the voice. His expression was one of disbelief, almost like: *'have I?'* He looked down as his wife placed her hand on his and he felt her touch. "Up you get," coaxed Margaret. "Time you went back to bed."

Everyone had fingers crossed as the woman led her husband slowly across the plank and back to the ship. He still seemed to be in a dream as he was lowered to sit on a wooden cask, and there he remained. "Well, that's one at least," commented Dib-Dob, "And Danny's okay to come over, but what about the two ladies?"

"I think I can get through to them," the boy called from the car. "They should know me." Turning around, he spoke to the young ladies on the back seat: "Remember me? I'm your little buddy. You said you were just along for the ride; well I've got an even better one for you than the 'Mazing Roller-Ghoster. Follow me and you'll soon be sailing on Captain Starlight's ship; but not on the sea – in the sky this time." Although the ladies remained unmoving, broad smiles of anticipation had lit up their faces giving Danny encouragement. "It's going to be mega-cool. Come on, let's walk the plank to a Huge adventure."

Hearing this, Moonshine chuckled: "Danny's stolen my favourite saying."

Unlike Margaret, the two young ladies were totally unafraid of heights and walked behind Danny across the plank as casually as if they were going on a stroll in the park.

With the rescued passengers safely on board and the ship lowered to the ground below, that seemed to be an end to the episode; but Joshua had just thought of another complication which involved what would happen when the real world came back to life again. At which point would that happen – before the Roller-Ghoster breakdown, or after? "If it's after," Joshua wondered, "What will the people who saw the accident think when they find the car hanging by two cables and nobody in it?"

There was only one way to find out; but first they guided Peter and the two ladies to the Roller-Ghoster ticket office and left them standing there, seemingly in a trance. The idea then was to return to the ship and Moonberry Pie it back to comic-book world. Danny really wanted to be a part of that: "I could go instead of Mum. She can stay here."

"I'm not so sure," said Joshua doubtfully. "I believe only the ones who brought the ship here should take it back. It might be better if you remain with the comic, Danny; just in case. Anyway, we don't have a spare cookie – Mum had to use yours."

The boy nodded and muttered a disappointed: "Suppose so."

Once on board Captain Starlight's ship, the others including Margaret positioned themselves around the sides as they had before and called out: "MOONBERRY PIE!" In a flash, the ship and all on board were once again returned to the first page of the Starlight and Moonshine comic story, The Quest for the Golden Gastropod.

"Time to go back to the fair, Mum," said Lucy.

"How do I do that?" asked Margaret.

“Just hold your cookie and say the words,” said Danny, speaking to the comic-book picture his mother was in. “It’s a piece of cake.” He grinned. “Well, pie, actually.”

Just before returning to the real world, Joshua said: “Good luck with your Quest, Dib-Dob. We’ll be joining you soon.”

Having called out the magic words, the three real people were whisked through the rainbow sky to their own world and found themselves right by the wooden seat with the table where they had started from. Danny was sitting with the comic still open on the table before him; and there, high in the air above them was... nothing but the metal tower, the cables extending down to the end of the track; and no sign whatever of a Roller-Ghoster car.

“We’re obviously in the right place,” observed Joshua, “But is the time before the accident or well after? Let’s head for the ticket office and see what’s happening there.”

A short walk brought them to a weird, albeit comforting scene: everyone in the fairground had come back to life, including the two young ladies and Peter. All of them, though, had disappointment written on their faces. Peter turned, saw Danny and said: “Sorry, Son. The Amazing Roller Ghoster is closed for repairs.” Somehow, it seemed, they had returned to the real world to a time before the accident had happened.

“Never mind, Dad,” said Danny casually. “Why don’t we go get that ice cream you were talking about instead?”

So, the complication Joshua had imagined had never taken place. Like her grandfather, Lucy had been wondering about something along the same lines. As soon as she got the opportunity and they were on their own, she asked her mother: “What did you think about Captain Starlight and Colonel Moonshine, Mum?”

Margaret frowned. “What’s to think about them – they’re just characters in a comic-book aren’t they? They’re not real.”

“Don’t tell Danny that,” said Lucy. “He believes they are.”

“Well,” said her mother, “If I believed like him, I might think they were real too.”

Lucy regarded her with a suspicious frown. “But you don’t believe, do you Mum?”

Margaret rocket her head from side to side, gave a wry smile, winked and said: “That would be telling, darling.”