

A Fine Adventure

A Story of Maiyim

by

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Author's Forward

This is an attempt at a children's story set on the world of Maiyim, although maybe it's more of a children's story for adults. It's certainly surreal in a sort of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* sort of way.

I decided to write such a story several years ago, but it took a while to find both a story and a slot in my schedule to write it. The story itself, as sometimes happens, was the hard part. After several attempts that ended up with nothing I liked, I noticed that *The Staff of Aritos*, Book Two of the *Ars Nova Magica* series, left me with a perfect opportunity for two stories. One was *A Promising Career* which featured Countess Ksanya and tied up the unwanted loose ends from *Staff*. The other was the following story which takes place during the Granomish Revolution.

It was a perfect setting. I had two royal children bored out of their minds looking for a spot of adventure, and where better to find it than in the back rooms of Methis' Forge? Well, it turned out there was more back there than I had counted on. As I planned the story, I briefly had an amusing thought about a cameo appearance by Pflum and Persi from the *Down Time, Ltd.* series, but as my hand-written notes say beneath several inches of crossed out notes, "Fun... but, no." However, observant readers will spot a quick in-joke that was generated by that series later on in the story.

As always, I offer the electronic form of this story free, but if you enjoy it, please consider donating a dollar or two to the Schwartz Center for Children, 374 Rockdale Avenue, New Bedford, MA 02740 <http://www.schwartzcenter.org/you-can-help.htm> The center is the only independent, community-based provider of therapy, education in the Southcoast Massachusetts area.

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A Fine Adventure

The Adventure Begins

“No, no, dear,” Auntie Fireiron repeated to Cousin Ksanya. “You’re tensing up again. You need to both concentrate and relax to make the magic work.”

“But isn’t what I’m doing more like anti-magic?” Ksanya asked.

“There’s no such thing,” Auntie Fireiron told her. “It’s like I told you two days ago. You are every bit as much of a mage as Oceanvine is. It’s just that you have a very limited repertoire. Still, if you can only have one trick, this is a good one to have if you can control it. Have another sip of tea and we’ll try again.”

Genovya and her younger brother, Ksaveras sat nearby and had been alternatively using crayons in their coloring books and watching them work for a few minutes, but the spectacle of two women who were apparently doing nothing could only hold their interest for so long and most of pages in the coloring books had been filled in. Kas and Genny were the crown prince and princess of the Kingdom of Granom, but something bad had happened in the capital city of Querna and a few nights earlier they and the rest of the royal family had been rushed to the safety of Auntie Fireiron’s home.

Neither Genny nor Kas really understood what was going on nor had their parents tried to explain it all. “We just need to go away for a while,” their mother, Queen Orya, told them. “It will be like a vacation.” So funny Uncle Candle had rushed them all out of the Wurra Palace through a series of secret tunnels and they eventually made their way here, wherever here was.

It had not been much of a vacation so far. Mom and Dad had been spending nearly all of their waking hours watching the television with Cousin Zak while Auntie Fireiron divided most of her time between coaching Cousin Ksanya and teaching Genny and Kas how to read and write.

Kas was actually still a bit too young to read, but he was at the stage that he wanted to do anything his big sister did, so while Genny would read the brightly colored books Auntie Fireiron gave her, he would pretend to do the same thing too. Auntie Fireiron would often give him interesting puzzles and games to play while Genny was struggling through a simple tale of two children and their dog and cat.

Genny liked reading well enough, but it was work and right now she was more interested in exploring Auntie Fireiron’s house. It was much more interesting than the palace. It had so many interesting things to see in it and Auntie Fireiron did not seem to mind if they touched those things and played with them. The house was warmer than the palace too; less drafty.

She looked at Kas, who was trying to read one of her books. It was mostly pictures with just a few words and he was holding it upside down. “Want me to read to you, Kas?” Genny asked, reaching for the book.

“I’m reading,” Kas complained, grabbing it away from her.

“No you aren’t,” she replied. As if to make a point she took the book, turned it right side up and handed it back to him. “You read it like that,” she told him.

“Nuh uh!” he denied stubbornly.

“Uh huh!” she shot back automatically.

They tossed those assertions back and forth for a few seconds before Auntie Fireiron stepped in. “You two must be hungry. There are some cookies in the kitchen. Some milk too,” she added.

“I like cookies,” Genny considered.

“I hate cookies,” Kas remarked stubbornly. “I like ice cream.” That first wasn’t really true, but this was a sort of a game he played with his sister from time to time, half in fun and half serious. If she said she liked something, he would deny it instantly and offer an alternative. Her own response was predictable.

“I hate ice cream,” she lied. “I like cake.”

“I hate cake,” Kas told her. “I like milk.”

“Well, there’s some of that in the kitchen too,” Auntie Fireiron cut them off. “Now, off you go.”

Genny led Kas into the kitchen where a plate full of cookies and two cups of cold milk were waiting for them. They didn’t wonder how the milk could still be cold even though no one had been in the kitchen in the last hour and a half, nor did they think to wonder how the plate of cookies came to be on the table when it had been completely cleared off after breakfast. What Genny had noticed in the last two days was that after a midmorning snack, Auntie Fireiron would start in on reading lessons again and right now she wanted to explore the house. Kas would have been content to just eat a cookie and drink his milk, but when Genny picked up a couple of the cookies and her milk and then started to leave the kitchen, he did the same thing.

They left the kitchen and walked through the living room where their parents and Cousin Zak were still watching the telly. There was a news broadcast on. Since they arrived, that seemed to be all that had been on in fact, and neither Genny nor Kas found that interesting, but the living room was on the way to Genny’s choice of destination.

“Where are you going, kids?” their mother asked.

“The playroom,” Genny told her.

“All right, dear,” Orya replied, nodding indulgently. “Play nicely.”

“We will,” Genny assured her.

“We will,” Kas echoed.

The playroom was not quite as Genny remembered it from the day before. At least she had not noticed all the child-sized plastic furniture or the swing set. They sat down at a small table in chairs that were

exactly right for them and had the milk and cookies. Genny was considering the swings when Kas found a book. The one constant in Auntie Fireiron's house was books. They were everywhere. Every spare stretch of wall was covered in bookshelves and there were always still more on tables and a few on chairs, where they had last been read. He picked the book up and put it on the table in front of Genny. Then he requested, "Read?"

Genny shrugged and opened the book. It was a bit more advanced than the ones she had been reading earlier and she only understood a bit over half of what it said, but she used her imagination and filled in the parts she didn't understand with a story of her own. When she was finished she closed the book and looked around. Along with the table and the swings there was also a small record player and some brightly colored vinyl disks with their favorite cartoon characters on the labels. There was also a small refrigerator filled with juices and other snacks, although she was no longer hungry and after seeing what was inside, closed the door again.

Meanwhile Kas managed to turn on the record player and get the needle on a bright red album disk, filling the room with a happy little song. He laughed and pointed at the record player, proud of his accomplishment. "Where do all these doors go?" he asked once the novelty of turning on a record player had passed.

The playroom had several doors in the wall. "Well we came in that one," Genny told him, pointing back toward the living room. Then she turned toward the opposite wall "And that one leads to the garage. Remember?"

"Uh huh," Kas nodded. "What about the others?" One wall had several windows through which the sunlight was currently shining but the other had another three doors. The first two turned out to be closets, but the third led to a long and winding staircase that went intriguingly down into the basement.

Behind them, the song ended, but the arm of the little record player glided up and back to the beginning and after a few seconds it started playing again. Genny considered the stairway. It seemed to go a very long way and it curved around and out of sight so she couldn't see the bottom, but in the end the temptation was too great and they started downward.

Unlike the furniture in the playroom, the stairs were full-sized and best suited for adult legs and while Genny was big enough to handle them with ease, Kas needed her help to go down them safely. It was a long and tiring journey and they stopped twice to rest on the way before finally reaching the bottom.

Resting on the last stair they looked ahead and saw a vast but well-lit cavern stretching out before them. Somewhere in the distance they could hear the soft dripping of water although it was dry where they were. It was a marvelous cave with a tall ceiling and opalescent stalagmites, stalactites and columns all around the edges. There were also several passages leading away from the cavern and once they had caught their breath, Genny and Kas were anxious to explore them. Someone had been carving into the walls of the first one they entered and those walls were covered with carvings and men and women doing things neither child could completely understand. The path twisted and curved, but after a few minutes it brought them back to the main gallery.

The next one they tried seemed more promising at first. It was covered in paintings, mostly of animals depicted in a strange and flat manner in tones of red and black. This passage spiraled downward for a while and then doubled back on itself and spiraled back up until it, too, brought them back to the main gallery. The third such passage, however, went somewhere else entirely.

They took about twenty steps down that way until they suddenly slipped and found themselves sliding

down a long, slick tunnel. The natural slide lasted well over a minute as they traveled back and forth in long gentle loops and were finally deposited gently down on the sandy shore of an underground lake.

“Fun!” Kas exclaimed. He was about to say more when the sound of his voice came back from across the lake. “Fun! Fun! Fun!” Both children giggled and laughed at that and spent the next few minutes shouting words to hear the echoes coming back.

“We can’t go back up this way,” Genny remarked practically. “We’ll have to find another way” So they explored the shore of the lake. However the cave walls came all the way down to the water at both ends of the beach, leaving them effectively stranded. Both she and Kas knew how to swim. There was a large pool in the Wurra Palace and they had been swimming practically since they had been born, but the far side of the lake seemed to be a long way away and the water was very cold. That worried Genny a little. She didn’t want to get all wet and she did not enjoy being cold either, but she steeled herself and commented. “I guess we’ll have to swim across.”

“Why?” a deep voice asked them from the water. They turned around to see a large turtle floating on the surface near the edge of the lake.

“Why what?” Genny responded

“Why would you need to swim?” the turtle asked. “If you need to cross the lake you should get into the boat.” He tilted his head toward the right and sure enough there was a small boat sitting on the shore of the lake that Genny was fairly certain had not been there a minute earlier.

“How did that get there?” she asked.

“The usual way,” the turtle replied. “Get into the boat.”

“But I don’t know how to row,” Genny protested even as Kas was gleefully climbing into the small wooden craft.

“I’ll say,” the turtle agreed instantly. “I’ll give you a hint, though; you need oars. Do you see any? No. That’s because there aren’t any, are there?”

“Then how do we make the boat move?” Genny asked.

“You don’t,” the turtle told her firmly. “That is my job. Go ahead, get in the boat.”

Genny climbed in and sat down on the plank seat at the stern of the boat next to Kas. “Well?” she asked. “Why aren’t we moving?”

“You should put on a life vest whenever you get into a boat,” the turtle informed her. “They should be there in the boat with you.” Genny picked up the two bright orange, thick floatation devices and gave one to Kas. She slipped her own on and buckled it snugly then helped her brother with his. Then finally once they were seated again, the turtle grabbed the dinghy’s painter in its mouth and started towing them across the lake.

When they reached the other side, they removed the life vests and placed them back under the seat before climbing back out of the boat. “Thank you, Mister Turtle,” Genny told him politely.

“Thank you, Mister Turtle,” Kas echoed.

“You’re welcome,” the turtle replied, his voice somewhat muffled and slurred by the fact that he still had a piece of rope in it.

The Libraries

The far side of the lake had only a small beach and another passage that led straight away from the lake. The children followed this new passage for a long time until they came to a large iron-bound door at its far end. Genny reached out and tried to open the door by turning the large knob, but nothing moved. Experimentally, she tried turning the knob in the other direction with the same lack of results. Then she tried knocking on the door, while calling out, “Hello!” but aside from the echo of her voice and a deep knocking sound that accompanied the rapping of her knuckles on the wooden parts of the door, nothing happened.

But Kas noticed a small white button next to the door and asked, “What’s this?”

“Maybe it’s the doorbell,” Genny speculated.

Kas pushed the button and at first all that happened was that the small button lit up, glowing brightly. Then, as they waited, instead of a bell or a buzzer, there was a long, quiet hiss of escaping air. That lasted a long time, but finally the door opened inward to reveal a large, brightly lit room.

The room was fully furnished with slate tiles on the floor and white plaster walls and ceiling with fine woodwork accents. There were at least two dozen well-padded chairs situated around a large piano, and, of course, several bookcases along the walls, although there was still room to actually see the walls as well as several paintings that had been hung on them.

Genny and Kas sat down on the piano bench and played on the instrument haphazardly for a few minutes, picking out some simple pieces that Genny had begun to learn, while Kas just tapped on keys at random.

“No, Kas,” Genny corrected him. “Use this key,” she added pointing at one of the white keys. Kas did so and while his rhythm was off, at least the note fit in with what Genny was trying to play some of the time. When they were finished, they applauded for themselves before getting up and examining the room a little more closely.

The door they had come in seemed to have disappeared, but this did not seem unusual to Genny since she had seen several concealed doors just a few days earlier when they left the palace. Besides there was a tall dark brown door on one of the other walls. They could use that one.

They soon found themselves walking down a very long corridor with a series of doors on either side. Each door had a glass window on it and each window had a word painted on it, but Genny did not recognize any of the words. All the windows were too high for either of them to see through so there was no alternative but to open each door in turn. Much to Genny’s surprise, every room was filled with books. The walls were completely lined with books and, except for a nice cozy area with a pair of reading chairs with a table and a lamp between them, there were even shelves filled with books in the middle of each room.

The lamps made Genny wonder why she hadn't noticed something before. "Where is all the light coming from?" she asked out loud.

"Huh?" Kas replied.

"The light," she explained. "We're under ground, right? I haven't seen any street lights or lamps or even fires anywhere. Why isn't it dark here?"

"Dunno," Kas admitted, looking around curiously.

The library they were in did not seem particularly interesting at the moment, nor did any of the next seven rooms. They all appeared to be identical, in fact, except for the colors of the bindings used on the books themselves. Genny thought the contents must vary from room to room as well, but as she wasn't interested in any of them, it hardly mattered. Finally after inspecting a dozen such libraries, they came across a door on which a word Genny did recognize had been painted, "Children."

Opening the door, they found a large room with brightly-colored furniture, similar to what they had found in the playroom. The books in here also seemed different than the ones in the other rooms. They were thinner and their bindings were more brightly colored. There was something else in this room the others had not contained.

"Hello, children!" the largest toy bear Genny had ever seen greeted them. "I'm Boris." Boris stood seven feet tall and had brown fur. At least it looked like fur, but something about it told Genny that it was the same sort of fake fur that could be found on the toy bear she had been forced to leave behind in the palace. "Would you like to read or be read to?"

"Where are we?" Genny asked.

"Where?" Kas echoed.

"This is the children's library, of course," Boris replied. "What would you like to read?"

"We're really just exploring," Genny replied.

"Perhaps you would like to explore a good book," Boris suggested cheerfully. "Or perhaps I could tell you a story."

Genny was about to politely decline, but Kas gleefully requested, "Story!"

"Okay!" Boris replied. He reached over his shoulder for a book then sat down on the floor with a same soft noise a pillow might make when plopped down on a wooden floor. He opened the book as Kas leaned up against his leg and started reading. "Once upon a time there was a little prince on the far off island of Rendah. The little prince was very lonely and wanted a friend ever so much. So one day he put on his hat and his cape and left his castle to go and look for a friend.

"First he went into the forest where he met a big red bird," Boris continued. "Will you be my friend?" the little prince asked."

Genny wasn't really interested in listening to the story, so while Boris read to Kas, she started looking through the books of the children's library. There were a lot of books in this room, just as there had been

in the others, but most of these were smaller and had a lot of pictures. She found an interesting one about a young boy who was also an ethernaut and rode on a spaceship to the moon where he met another boy and had a fun time throwing rocks at a moon monster before flying back to Maiyim in time for tea.

The story bothered her a bit. She knew about afternoon tea time because it was something her mother liked to do even though it was a custom more commonly practiced in a funny foreign kingdom called Emmine. She had only met a few people from Emmine. Uncle Candle was one of them as were his two students, Lady Oceanvine and Sir Sextant. They seemed nice enough, although they were taller than most Granomen and their skin was darker. Granomen all had chalk white skin and most had brown hair as well. Humans, she knew might have one of many skin colors and evidently had a wide variety of hair colors too. That didn't seem like an important difference though, and Genny thought it odd she had never met any of the royal family of Emmine. Maybe they just did not have any small children, although even that seemed unlikely to her. Perhaps Emmine was just so far away that very few people could afford to travel all this way or maybe it was such a nice place that nobody ever wanted to leave. She decided she would ask Uncle Candle about that next time she saw him.

She was still thinking about Emmine and the other foreign countries of Maiyim when Kas found her and announced, "Time to go again."

"Hmm?" she was startled.

"Explore!" Kas insisted.

"Oh, okay," Genny replied, getting up from where she had been sitting on the warm library floor. "Where should we go now?"

"If you want to explore," Boris replied helpfully, "You should try the eighth door down the hall on your left. Can you count to eight?"

"Of course I can count to eight," Genny replied. She was actually quite proud of that ability as it was Auntie Fireiron who had been drilling her on her numbers just the day before.

"Count with me then," Boris instructed, and they counted out loud together "One, two, three, four, five six, seven, eight!"

Boris looked like he was going to ask her to do it again, so she held up four fingers on each hand and repeated, "Eight."

"That's right," Boris agreed. He only had four stubby little fingers on each paw, so he held up both paws and confirmed, "Eight."

"Bye bye, Mister Bear!" Kas told him happily.

"Bye bye, Kas and bye bye, Genny," Boris told them.

"See ya, Boris," Genny replied, wondering how he knew their names, but decided Kas must have told him.

"Come back soon!" Boris invited them as they closed the door.

A Walk on the Beach

As she closed the door, Genny realized she had not asked what she should expect to find at the eighth door on the left and was about to go back when she realized they would find out soon enough, so she took Kas by the hand and they continued on and counted the doors as they went. "One door," she announced and Kas quickly repeated the phrase. "Two, three, four..." and so on until they reached the eighth door. "Well that was silly!" Genny exclaimed on reaching the door.

"Silly!" Kas echoed happily.

"Boris might as well have told us to go to the first door that didn't have a window," Genny continued. The door was unlike any of the others in the hall so far. It was also somewhat shorter and Genny thought some adults might have had to bend over to get through the door. It also had an odd bar shaped latch that she had to push to one side before opening the door. A warm, moist breeze blew in to envelope them as she pushed the door open and they saw a warm, sunny, white sand beach with palm trees.

"It's warm out today," Genny remarked. There had still been snow on the ground in the shadows of the palace when they left, but Auntie Fireiron's home, she knew, was on the southern end of the island, so maybe it was warmer here. It was a big island. "Want to walk on the beach, Kas?"

"Yeah," Kas replied. "On the beach."

Together they walked in the sand. They soon discovered that walking in dry sand could be tiring, so they continued down toward the water's edge where the sand was damp and firm and where it took less effort to walk. "Look!" Genny pointed ahead of them. "It's a lighthouse."

"Lighthouse," Kas agreed, then asked, "What's that?"

"I'm not sure," she admitted after a few seconds. "I think it's there so ships can see where they're going at night. Let's take a closer look." The lighthouse was a tall, red and white striped spire that poked its way over fifty feet into the sky. There was a large round room at the top with glass windows all around. The base of the lighthouse tower was attached to a small house where the light keeper should live. It was a bright and sunny day, the light was not currently operating and no one answered when Genny knocked on the door.

Finding no one at home, they continued down the beach. There was a sea otter sitting on the sand just behind the lighthouse. He was surrounded by several piles of scallop shells and appeared to be busily inspecting and counting them. As he finished with each one, he would place it in a little plastic bag and then put the bag on a stack of others until there were ten shells piled up neatly and then he would begin another stack.

Genny was fairly certain he was quite large for an otter as he was almost as large as she was, but before she could remark on it, the otter looked up and told them irritably, "Mine! Go away!"

"What are you doing?" Genny asked curiously.

"Counting," the otter replied curtly. "Now go away!"

"Why?" Genny persisted.

“Because I told you to,” the otter snapped at her.

“No,” Genny tried to explain. “I meant why are you counting shells?”

“How else would I know how many I have?” the otter asked. “Oh, drat! You made me lose my count. Now I’ll have to start all over again. Go away!”

Genny was all in favor of leaving the ornery creature alone, but Kas reached out toward one of the scallop shells and exclaimed, “Pretty!”

“Mine!” the otter snapped at him, batting Kas’ hand away from the shell.

“There are hundreds of shells all over the beach,” Genny told the otter angrily as Kas began crying at the harsh treatment. “We don’t need any of your stinking shells.” She took Kas’ hand and found another scallop shell for him just a few feet away.

Kas was delighted, but the otter sneered, “That’s not a good one.”

“You’re being silly,” Genny told him. “A shell is just a shell and this one is as good as any of yours.”

“Shows how little you know about it,” the otter grumbled, before going back to his shells, counting, “One... two... three... four...”

“All right,” Genny interrupted him again. “What’s the difference then?”

“Each of my shells is a perfect example,” the otter explained.

“Of what?” Genny asked.

“You wouldn’t understand,” the otter told her.

“Of course I wouldn’t if you won’t explain it,” Genny told him.

“These shells are properly sorted,” the otter told her. “They are all the right size.”

“The right size for what?”

“For the bags I keep them in, of course,” the otter told her peevishly.

“But what do you do with them?” Genny asked.

“I keep them,” the otter told her. “I’ll take them home and put them all in a locked cabinet all nice and safe. That’s what collecting is all about.”

“That’s it?” Genny asked, puzzled. “Don’t you even show them to others?”

“Of course not!” the otter sniffed. “Overexposure to light could cause them to fade.”

“Light?” Genny asked.

“Yes, child, light!” the otter sneered.

“You mean like sunlight?” Genny asked curiously. “Bright today, isn’t it?”

The otter suddenly looked up as though noticing the sun for the very first time. “Yipe!” he shrieked before scooping all his shells into a big bag. Then he jumped into the sea and promptly disappeared.

“Strange person,” Genny remarked before taking Kas’ hand in her own once more.

They continued walking down the beach, occasionally stopping to look at an interesting shell or pebble. After a few hundred yards they saw a large rabbit with a wheelbarrow, pushing his way down toward the water. Like the otter, he too was much larger than the children would have expected. The wheelbarrow was filled with small and shiny pebbles of various colors, and when he finally reached the area where the sand was firm, he dumped the contents of the barrow on the ground and heaved a sigh of relief.

“Glad that’s over,” he commented to the children. “I used to be a collector, but all I managed to do was fill my home with useless junk.”

“What are these?” Genny asked, picking up one of the pretty stones, it was a bright blood red in color.

“Worthless garbage,” the rabbit replied. “Oh they’re pretty enough, I suppose, but what use could I possibly have for them. A few might decorate my home, I suppose, but all of them? I had closets full that I never had the time to look at and yet I spent all my time trying to get more and more.”

“That was silly,” Genny admitted. “What good is a collection if you cannot share it?”

“Exactly!” the rabbit nodded. “What a wise child you are.”

“Thank you,” Genny nodded, “but what are these, anyway?”

“Gemstones,” the rabbit told her. “Rubies, emeralds, sapphires, diamonds, amethysts and much more. Sure am glad to get these out of my home, there wasn’t any room left for me.”

“But these are valuable,” Genny protested, “or at least so I’ve been told.”

“What?” the rabbit asked nervously. “They are?”

“Yes,” Genny nodded. “They get used in jewelry and things like that all the time. People think they’re pretty.”

“Ahhck!” the rabbit suddenly cried and started putting the colorful pebbles back into the wheelbarrow. “My gemstones! That’s mine too!” he snapped at her, snatching the ruby she was holding. “Don’t steal it!”

“I wasn’t stealing,” Genny protested. “A minute ago you were throwing these away. You said they were worthless garbage.”

“Says you!” the rabbit cried, continuing to pile the loose gems back into his barrow. “And now I have to find all the other stones I threw away too. This will take years. Years, I say!”

Genny just shook her head and led Kas away from the silly rabbit and continued to walk down the beach.

A Case of Mistaken Identity

“It’s hot,” Kas complained a few minutes later.

“You’re right,” Genny agreed. “Maybe we should walk in the shade for a while?”

“Please,” Kas nodded.

So Genny led him closer to the palms that marked the edge of the beach. The going was more difficult in the looser sand there, but she felt it was worth it to be in the cooler shade for a while. Finally they reached a pathway that led into the tropical forest and away from the beach. “Let’s see where this goes,” Genny suggested.

As they traveled down the path, the palm trees gradually disappeared and were replaced by oaks. It was a winding path and soon after they had entered it, they could no longer see the beach nor hear the waves breaking on it. It was also a narrow path at first and they had to walk single-file, but it soon widened out and they were able to walk side-by-side once more. A few minutes later, however, they were startled when a fantastic creature suddenly crashed out of the undergrowth and stood blocking their way on the path.

It was tall, towering over the children by several feet and it had eight legs and the wings of a hawk or an eagle, though much larger, of course. Overall, however, it was still very much a bear. It paused to look at the children, then lumbered slowly toward them curiously. Genny and Kas were just as curious about the strange beast as it was about them.

“Who are you?” Kas asked it.

The winged bear snuffed a bit at the question, “Hmmp?”

“Is that your name?” Genny asked. “Hmmp?”

“No,” the bear replied with a deep, but unmistakably feminine voice, “I am Mora.”

“Please to meet you, Mora,” Genny replied, remembering her manners. “My name is Genovya although most people call me Genny, and this is my brother Ksaveras, or Kas for short.”

“Hmmp, and you are short too, aren’t you?” Mora observed. “What sort of beings are you?”

“We’re children,” Genny replied.

“Yes,” Mora nodded, “I can see that, but what sort of children?”

“We’re Granomen,” Genny supplied, then added, “Daddy’s the king.”

“And so your mother is the queen, I suppose?” Mora asked. “Yes, I believe that’s the way these things generally work. A silly system, if you ask me, which you didn’t. Granomen, eh? Hmm, yes, that might explain it. Tell me, child, is it difficult walking on only two feet?”

“Is it hard walking on eight feet?” Genny countered.

“It is natural to walk on eight feet,” Mora sniffed again. “It is a very safe and stable way of doing it. You should try it some time. I hardly ever fall down.”

“Well, I don’t fall down very much either,” Genny retorted, “unless I want to. It seems to me that eight legs have to be more difficult to use than merely two. How do you keep from tripping over your own feet?”

“Silly child!” Mora scoffed. “Alarusines never, ever trip over their own feet.”

“Oh,” Genny replied. “Well, I suppose you could always fly if you started to stumble, right?”

“Fly, child?” Mora asked, taken aback. “Why, whatever do you mean?”

“You have wings,” Genny pointed out. “Rather large and beautiful wings, in fact.”

“I most certainly do not!” Mora shouted back angrily. “That’s a vicious lie!” And with that pronouncement, she lumbered off the path muttering to herself and crashing through still more undergrowth as she went.

“What a silly creature!” Genny observed.

“Silly!” Kas agreed cheerfully.

“I wonder why she won’t admit she has wings,” Genny thought out loud.

“Yeah, they’re kind of hard to miss, huh, kid?” a high pitched voice said from above them.

Genny and Kas looked up and saw a bright blue monkey with an extra hand at the end of his tail. “And who are you?” Genny asked.

“Name’s Algernon,” the monkey replied. “I live in these woods.”

“I thought you might,” Genny admitted. “But why doesn’t Mora admit she has wings?”

“She thinks she’s a bear,” Algernon explained.

“She is a bear, sort of,” Genny replied. “Although I think she called herself an Alar... something.”

“Alarusine,” Algernon supplied. “No, that’s just the name of her family. She is Mora Alarusine.”

“And you are Algernon Monkey?” Genny asked.

“That’s Monqué, if you do not mind,” Algernon told her, taken aback.

Oh,” Genny responded and apologized, “Sorry.”

“You were close though,” Algernon told her, cheerful once again. “How did you know?”

“Um, well, you see...” Genny hedged while searching for a polite answer, not wanting to insult the blue

monkey with the extra hand. If Mora didn't admit to having wings, what would Algernon not want to see about himself? Finally she just told him, "I just guessed."

"Lucky guess," Algernon admitted. "Anyway, she thinks she's a bear and bears don't have wings. Therefore she can't possibly have wings. See?"

"But that's just silly!" Genny observed.

"Silly!" Kaz echoed joyfully again.

"Silly it may be," Algernon nodded, "but that's the way it is."

"But bears only have four legs and she has eight," Genny protested.

"Try telling her that!" Algernon retorted. "Some people just don't know themselves very well. Now, I have absolutely no trouble at all with my identity."

"So you're happy as a bright blue monkey?" Genny asked, then corrected herself, "Uh... monqué?"

"Blue?" Algernon shrieked indignantly. "Blue? Well, I never!" and grabbing a nearby vine by the hand on his tail he swung away and out of sight.

"I seem to be upsetting all the animals today," Genny observed. "I don't think Mommy would be very pleased with my behavior."

"Silly!" Kas told her.

"Who?" Genny asked. "Me or them?" But Kas merely nodded, smiling. Genny sighed. Little brothers could be such a bother sometimes.

They continued on down the path, but a few minutes later Kas complained, "I'm hungry!"

"Have an apple," someone above them suggested.

They looked upward, expecting to see another blue monkey or something equally strange, but instead all they saw was the limb of a tree, filled with bright red apples moving gently down toward them. "Go ahead," the voice urged them when the limb was finally within their reach.

"Who are you?" Genny asked, even as Kas reached eagerly for one of the fruits.

"I'm an apple tree, of course," the voice replied calmly. "I mean if I were a pine tree I probably would have offered you pine nuts or maybe just the cones."

"That makes sense," Genny allowed, "But you really want us to eat your apples?"

"Of course," the apple tree replied. "That's part of how I scatter my seeds. Creatures eat my fruit and drop the seeds behind. The seeds sprout and new apple trees are born."

"Oh, okay," Genny nodded and took an apple. "It's very good," she reported after taking a bite."

"Thank you," the tree replied politely.

“You’re welcome,” Genny told it. “Where should I put the seeds when I am done?”

“As far away as you can,” the tree replied. “That way my children will spread far and wide.”

The children stayed under the apple tree for a while discussing the weather and other concerns the tree had. “Oh, I live in absolute fear of saws and axes,” it admitted a few minutes later. “Terrible hard metallic things that bite and kill.”

“Yes,” Genny agreed, “I can see how that would worry you, but saws can be a good thing too, you know.”

“I don’t see how,” the tree told her.

“Well, what if one of your limbs dies?” Genny asked. “We have a lot of trees in the royal garden back home and sometimes a limb dies, so the gardener will cut off the dead limb.”

“Sounds painful,” the tree commented.

“I don’t think so,” Genny replied, “or at least not much. I mean the branch is already dead right?”

“Well I suppose,” the tree allowed uncertainly, “but why cut it off?”

“The gardener says it makes the rest of the tree stronger,” Genny told it.

“I don’t know,” the tree shook a bit. “It sounds like a radical procedure to me. The dead branch would probably drop off sooner or later anyway.”

“But this also makes the tree look nicer,” Genny explained.

“Cosmetic surgery,” the tree replied. “If you don’t need it, why bother? I’d far rather be healthy than pretty.”

“And are you healthy?” Genny asked. “I mean you look good to me, but...”

“Well the air does smell funny some days,” the tree admitted, “and that makes me feel ill, but usually I’m quite well, indeed.”

“Oh,” Genny replied, not knowing what else to say. “Well, we’re rested now so we probably ought to keep moving.”

“I’ve never understood that about animals,” the tree admitted. “You always keep moving. You ought to try sitting in the same place for a few years sometime. Well, have a nice day and be good and don’t forget to spread the seeds!”

“We won’t,” Genny promised and led Kas further down the forest path. As they went they occasionally dropped a few apple seeds until they were all gone.

Flight of Fancy

They had just dropped the last of the apple seeds when they spotted a tall, brown and fuzzy-looking bird standing next to the path. “You’re an emu, aren’t you?” Genny asked. She remembering seeing a picture of one in her coloring book.

“Yes,” the emu replied, looking down at the children. “And you’re children, aren’t you? Would you like to come flying with me?”

“I thought emus were not able to fly,” Genny remarked.

“All birds fly,” the emu insisted. “Follow me and I’ll show you.” He ran on ahead of the children, but they followed behind as fast as they could and soon reached the edge of the forest. Ahead of them was a small airplane sitting on the tarmac of a landing strip. “Come on!” the bird called to them as he climbed into the plane’s cockpit.

Genny looked at the airplane. It was an old biplane with cloth-covered wings and only two seats. Even to her inexperienced eyes it seemed like a fairly delicate craft. “Is it safe?” she asked.

“Of course she is!” the emu replied enthusiastically. “I fly in her all the time.”

“Um, okay,” Genny decided. “How do we get up into the seat?”

“Oh, that is a problem,” the emu admitted. He jumped back down to the ground and crouched down beside the passenger seat. “Here, climb up on my back and I’ll give you a lift.”

Soon Kas and Genny were sharing a seat and the emu jumped back into the pilot’s seat. He flipped a switch and announced, “She’s hot!” Then he jumped back down and quickly ran to the front and expertly pulled on the propeller. He tried that several times then ran back to the cockpit and checked the switch. He clicked it off and on a few times and then tried pulling the prop again.

The second try had the same effect as the first and the emu had to take a break to catch his breath. “The engine usually starts on the first try,” he told the children, “but sometimes she likes me to get my exercise. Third times the charm, don’t you know.”

Then he tried it one last time and the engine started up perfectly and the plane started rolling forward. “Eeep!” the emu cried and he started running in front of the plane. “I forgot to set the brake!”

The children laughed as the emu ran in front of the airplane and it seemed to chase him in circles for several minutes. Finally, the emu was able to get far enough ahead of the airplane’s spiral path and managed to circle around back to the cockpit. He hopped in and steered the craft back to the head of the runway. Then, opening up the throttle, the engine grew louder and higher pitched as the little plane raced down the runway and then finally lifted up and into the air.

The plane pitched slightly upward and rose gently. And the children watched the ground drop gradually beneath them. “She’s not a very fast plane, is she?” Genny asked over the whine of the engine.

“No,” the emu laughed. “She’s a very basic plane. “No starter, no radio, no instruments... Doesn’t even have a heater. I’ve been thinking of replacing the wind speed gauge with a calendar.”

“Would that work?” Genny wondered.

“I’d know what day it was,” the emu replied.

The emu piloted the plane ever higher and as they rose gracefully into the air, they were able to look down on the land below. “See down there to the right?” the emu asked. That’s the forest where I met you and beyond that is the beach.”

“I see the lighthouse!” Genny exclaimed. “Kas, do you see it?”

“Lighthouse!” Kas laughed and pointed at the striped spire.

“It’s cold up here,” Genny observed.

“This isn’t so bad,” the emu laughed. “We’re over four thousand feet up right now so you have to expect it to be a bit cooler than on the ground. If you think this is cold, you ought to try flying in the winter. Are you strapped in good?”

“What?” Genny asked.

“Is your seat belt attached and secure?” the emu asked. “Make sure now.”

Genny checked the seat belt that held both her and Kas and pulled on it a few times. “It’s good,” she reported.

“Let’s see how good,” the emu told her and steered the plane into a slow roll.

Genny shrieked as the world seemed to turn upside down and then righted itself.

“Fun, huh?” the emu asked. “Want to go again? Let’s try a barrel roll now.” He brought the plane through a maneuver that was a combination of a loop and roll and Genny and Kaz felt themselves being pressed hard back into their seats. “Now let’s try a loop!” the emus suggested.

They spent the next half hour flying in various exciting aerobatic figures, each one more thrilling than the last. Finally, he leveled off the flight, flew once around the island and headed back toward the landing strip. That was when Genny noticed something was wrong. She knew Auntie Fireiron’s house was on the island of Quirnlia, one of the largest inhabited islands on the world of Maiyim just as was the Wurra Palace, which Genny thought of as home. But the island below them was much too small. It had taken many hours to get from the palace to Auntie Fireiron’s, but it only took a few minutes to fly around the island below and they could see the ocean all around it too.

She wanted to ask about that, but when they finally landed and disembarked from the plane, the question she asked was, “Why couldn’t we see Auntie Fireiron’s house?”

“What house?” the emu countered, obviously confused.

“The house we came from,” Genny explained. “It should be in that direction, I think” She pointed back toward the beach.

“I have never seen a house in that direction,” the emu responded, “unless you mean the lighthouse.”

“No,” Genny replied. “I think we had better start heading back, though. Thank you for the ride!”

“You’re welcome!” the emu replied.

The Ice House

Genny was deeply bothered by the emu’s reaction to her question about Auntie Fireiron’s home, but was more intent on finding her way back there than in worrying about whether the bird knew where it was. She had not looked behind her while leaving the library area so it was possible it did not look like a house from here, wherever here was.

However, when they headed back in the direction from which they came, it soon became apparent they must have gone the wrong way. This was not a forest of oaks, but of ashes and beeches and while neither Genny nor Kas knew the names of such trees, they could see the leaves were different shapes than before and the colors were closer to blue than green. “Is this a normal color for leaves?” Genny wondered aloud.

“Maybe,” Kas replied.

“This is definitely not the same path,” Genny continued. “The other was fairly straight, but this one twists and turns, and there are more trees here.”

“Maybe the path changed while we weren’t looking,” Kas suggested.

Genny thought about that. She did not think that was possible, but she had also been certain they were headed in the right direction. The trip in the airplane must have turned her all around. Then she remembered something her mother had told her about finding her way and she looked up to see where the sun was. She knew that at this time in the afternoon it ought to be somewhere south of southwest. At first she could not see it for the trees, but as they continued on, they found a small break in the leafy canopy through which the sun winked at her.

She smiled and waved back at the sun, certain that in spite of the different seeming forest, they were where she thought they were. Maybe it was not the same path, but in its twisty, winding manner it was headed more or less back in the direction they wanted to go.

“Now where are we?” she wondered.

There was no immediate answer either from Kas or anyone else in the vicinity. The forest was quiet. In fact, it was completely silent save for the noises Genny and Kas were making. There were no bird songs, no sounds of animal rustling the leaves on the ground, not even the sound of the wind in the trees.

They walked for another few minutes before reaching a wide clearing in the forest. At the center of that clearing was a small cottage. At first Genny thought it might have been Auntie Fireiron’s, but on second glance the house was far too small and the shutters were not quite the right shade of green. Still, it was directly on their path so they walked right up to it and got a closer look.

The door was open and they walked inside to discover that the small house had only one room. It was very cold inside the building with long icicles hanging from the ceiling and a floor of smooth ice. In the center of the room a large white polar bear sat by a hole in the floor with a fishing rod. As they watched, he reeled in the hook and dropped it back into the hole. Then he picked up a mug filled with a steaming liquid of some sort and took a sip.

Kas asked him, "Catch anything?"

The bear looked up, slightly startled, but replied calmly, "No, child, not yet. I don't think they're biting today."

"Maybe they will soon," Genny commented.

"Perhaps," the bear nodded. "It must be cold in here for you. Would you like some tea?" He gestured toward a small alcohol stove which held a kettle that was obviously just off the boil.

"Yes, please," Genny replied. So the bear put his rod and reel down on the ice and filled two large stoneware mugs and sweetened the tea with honey before handing them to the children. "Thank you," Genny replied politely. Kas nodded his thanks, quickly taking a sip of the hot liquid.

While they were drinking the tea, the bear finally got a bite and put his mug down to direct his entire attention to the fishing pole. He fought with it for several minutes, playing a game of give and take until he finally pulled out a small fish from the hole in the ice. To Genny's astonishment, the fish had a pair of wings. She would have asked about that except that just then the fish got off the hook, flew around the room twice and then went out the door.

"Silly fish," the white bear grumbled. "It will never survive out there. I'd better go bring it back and he ran out through the cottage's door as well.

Genny and Kas finished their tea and when it became apparent the bear would not be coming back soon, left their mugs next to his and exited the cold house. "It's really much too cold inside today," Genny commented as they left.

After their stay in the ice house, the weather outside seemed very hot and humid, but since they were not dressed for cold weather, that was all for the best. High above them, black clouds were rolling in from the horizon and they heard the soft rumble of distant thunder.

"We should hurry on and get back to Auntie Fireiron's before it rains," Genny told Kas and she walked at a brisker pace than before.

Soon the clouds filled the sky and the day grew darker and darker as the rumbles of thunder got louder and more frequent. Absently, as they hurried through the forest, Genny noted that the trees had changed once again and this time they seemed to be surrounded by some very tall and wide evergreens of some sort. The first few drops were starting to fall on the upper needles of those trees when they found a particularly wide one with a door in the side.

"We need to get out of the rain," she told her younger brother practically and when no one answered after she knocked, she tried the handle and opened the door, entering the tree just as rain and hail began to pummel the ground behind them.

Upside Down and All Around

The tree's door did not open up to reveal a room, but a small landing at the top of a spiral staircase that went down into the ground. "We should probably wait up here until after it stops raining," Genny

remarked to Kas, but as soon as she said it, the floor moved beneath them and they were quickly deposited on the stairway. "I think the tree wants us to go down," Genny observed, but before either of them could start down the stairway, the steps themselves tilted to form a long spiral ramp.

Down and down they slid, going round and round for what seemed like forever. As they went the light around them changed from red to orange, then yellow to green, blue and finally violet. The light turned white once more and they came to the end of the ramp only to fall a few feet on to a deep pile of cushions.

"Again!" Kas cried joyfully.

"That was fun," Genny agreed, "but we need to find our way back now."

"Climb the slide?" Kas asked.

"I don't think so," Genny shook her head. "The end is out of our reach and it was too slippery anyway. There must be another way out."

They crawled their way clumsily beyond the pile of cushions to find a wide hallway leading away from the end of the spiral slide. Since there did not appear to be any other way to go, they set off in that direction and continued walking for several long minutes. Finally, the long corridor ended at another, larger room.

The room seemed to have been built upside down, however. They were walking on a white plaster ceiling and above them was a brown wooden floor with a large round rug in the middle of the room along with a smattering of furniture. There were some paintings on the walls, all hung upside down, of course. Even the door on the far side of the room only came within a foot of the ceiling. There were also two people walking around on the floor above them.

Looking up at the floor, Genny realized they were children and, in fact, appeared identical to her and Kas. "Hello!" she greeted them.

"Olleh!" the upside down girl called back.

"Who are you?" Genny asked, confused. Because the upside down girl spoke backwards it turned out to be hard to communicate with each other. However, with a lot of slow repetition, Genny finally understood that the other girl's name was Ynneg and the boy's was Sak. Communicating much beyond that, all four children found extremely frustrating, but Kas and Sak found they could play by tossing a large red ball up and down to each other. Genny and Ynneg joined in for a while, but eventually Sak grew tired and wanted to take a nap on the sofa. Genny looked around the ceiling but except for an upside down light fixture, there was not much on their side of the room. Kas was looking as tired as Sak, however.

"Do you want to take a nap too, Kas?" Genny asked.

"No!" Kas shook his head stubbornly in spite of his obvious weariness. "No nap!" Well, Kas had never wanted to nap when someone suggested it to him so maybe that was something upside down or backwards about Sak.

Genny looked back upward and now Ynneg was lying down on the sofa too, so Genny merely waved goodbye and continued on through the door on the far side of the room.

As they walked down a round tunnel, the oddest thing happened. The change was so gradual they didn't notice at first, but little by little they found themselves walking on the side of the round tunnel rather than the floor and by the time they reached the next room several minutes later they felt like they were upside down themselves, although they stayed firmly attached to what now felt like the top of the tunnel.

On entering the next room, they found they were once again walking on a floor, rather than a ceiling and there was another large sofa and several comfortable chairs here. However, it still felt like the ceiling was down and the floor was up and they very much felt like they were about to fall to the ceiling, except they just did not. Like the last room, this too had two doors; one they had come in by and the other on the far side.

Having finally found a place where they could be comfortable, however, assuming they could ignore the feeling they were about to fall to the ceiling, Kas decided that he really did want to nap for a bit. Genny discovered that lying down was more comfortable than standing or sitting up so she stretched out on the sofa too and soon fell asleep.

When she woke up, it seemed that Kas had not wanted to sleep for long because he was nowhere in sight and the next door stood wide open. "Kas!" Genny called. "Where are you?" When there was no answer, she got up and hurried on, hoping to catch up with him. She was almost through the door, when it occurred to her that he might have decided to go back to the room where they had met Sak and Ynneg and she hurried back to the other door only to find it was locked.

"Well," she said to herself, "I guess he really did go the other way." It was then that she noticed that she no longer felt upside down. That was a relief. The feeling she was about to fall had bothered her more than she realized, but now at least that worry was over, leaving her entirely free to worry about her younger brother.

She ran up the next corridor for at least a quarter of an hour and it led gently upward until she reached another door which opened up on a large round room which had another eleven doors evenly spaced all around it. While each door was the same size, they were all quite different. Some were ornately carved and others were painted in a variety of styles and colors or both.

As she entered the room, the door behind her snapped shut and the room spun around while cheerful calliope music seemed to come from just above the ceiling. After almost a minute of that the room and the music stopped, so Genny tried to open the door she had just entered. It turned out to be locked as were the next five she tried, but on opening the sixth door she found a large, brightly lit room.

Kas did not appear to be in that room and Genny wanted to try the other doors before moving on. However, the moment she backed away from the open door, it snapped shut and the room began to spin and the music began to play once again. When it finally stopped, the door she had found open was now locked and she started trying the others once more.

This time she only had to open three doors before finding the brightly lit room, but once more, when she hesitated to enter, the door shut and the room started spinning. The next three attempts brought her back to the corridor that had brought her here. Then finally she found the bright room again. "What's the point of all this if there's only two doors that work at a time?" Genny asked out loud, but once more there was no one around to supply an answer.

The bright room was triangularly shaped and had a door on each wall. The door closed behind Genny once again, but this time the room did not appear to move, nor was there any music. She tried opening

the door on the right and found a very large square-shaped room with a door on each wall. Before moving on, she wanted to look through the third door, but suspecting this one would close if she backed away, Genny removed her shoe and used it to prop the door partially open. The door remained open, but when she tried the other door it would not open.

She retrieved her shoe and let the door close then tried the other door again. When it opened she saw a large square-shaped room through that one too, but there was something wrong. The size of the room was such that on one side the two square rooms should overlap. She went into the square room and paced it off to measure it, then returned through the triangular room to measure the other square room. Sure enough, the two rooms should have been conjoined, but they were not. Genny thought about that and concluded that if someone could twist things around so that two rooms could overlap this way, then maybe they were really the same room.

If that were the case, she worried, then it would not matter which room she went through, because they would be the same. However, if they were not the same room she might not be able to find Kas. That she might get lost herself did not occur to her.

To test that idea she removed her shoe once more and placed it in the middle of the room. Then she returned to the triangular room and checked the other door. Genny was not sure if she was more bothered by not finding her shoe in that other square room than she would have been if it were there. Shrugging, she decided her measurements must not be correct and she returned to the first room only to discover her shoe was still missing. However, when she turned around and went back, her shoe appeared in the second room.

She was about to get her shoe back when an idea occurred to her. She let the door close then quickly reopened it. There in the center of the room was a little man with red skin and metallic gold hair. He was holding her shoe and on seeing Genny, he started running toward one of the other doors.

“Hey!” Genny shouted and ran after him.

The little red man ducked through another door with Genny in hot pursuit. The room beyond that door was just a small closet and Genny caught up easily and wrested her shoe back out of his grip. “Who are you?” she demanded.

“Tom,” he replied. “No, I mean my name is Robert. Yeah, that’s it; Robert.”

“Robert?” Genny asked, putting her shoe back on.

“Uh, yeah,” the red man told her.

“How many square rooms are there?” she asked, getting to the heart of her problem.

“Just one,” he replied quickly, then corrected himself, “Well actually, there are three.”

“Three?” Genny asked.

“Three,” the man told her. “Yeah.”

“That can’t be right,” Genny accused.

“It’s not,” the man replied instantly, then corrected himself again, “I mean how would you know? You’re

just a kid. I work here, so I should know how many square rooms there are. Four - one for each wall.”

“Four? You said, ‘three,’” Genny reminded him.

“I did,” the man confirmed. “I was wrong. It’s five.”

“You’re lying,” Genny concluded.

“Well, yeah. I mean, no I am not, you presumptuous little girl! How dare you accuse me of lying?” But Genny was no longer listening to him. Instead she was looking around in his small room. There was only one door here, so there was only one way out. She also noticed that he always said one thing, then said something else altogether.

“So there really is only one square room?” she asked him.

“Right,” he nodded then shook his head and told her, “No, five.”

“And there’s only one way out of here, isn’t there?” she pressed.

“It’s simple enough,” he admitted, then shook his head again and told her, “It’s a maze and without me as your guide you’ll get hopelessly lost.”

“So Kas must have gone through the square room,” Genny told herself. The little red man agreed and then changed his mind and told her something else entirely. Genny, however was already on her way back to the square room.

Checking all the doors, she found that two led back to the triangular room, one to the red man’s closet and the fourth was an oddly shaped room whose walls were completely covered with mirrors. The little red man tried to distract her from entering the mirror room, but she ignored him and he did not follow her as she entered.

At first she was confused by the mirrors, but then she noticed that while there were mirrors on the walls and ceiling, the floor was covered in yellow tiles and that if she kept her eyes on the floor she had little trouble making her way through the room and into a maze which was made up of mirrors, although every so often one of the panels was clear glass instead. Her plan to keep her eyes on the floor was not perfect as every so often she would forget and look up and either see her reflections fading back into infinity or would run into a glass panel where she thought an opening might be.

However, as confusing as the maze might have been, it was really only a minor inconvenience compared to the larger issue of finding her brother. Eventually, Genny reached the end of the maze and found herself on the edge of a subterranean river. There was a small boat on the shore of the river and another little red person with golden hair was seated in the boat. Instead of a man, this person was a woman, but Genny did not want to deal with another liar, so soon so before encountering the red woman, she examined the area closely.

It soon became apparent that the small stretch of riverside was completely isolated and, if she wished to travel on, it would be necessary to get into the boat.

“Did my brother come through here?” she asked the red woman at last. The woman said nothing, but she did nod her head affirmatively.

“He did?” Genny asked again. The woman nodded once more.

“Did you give him a ride in your boat?” Genny asked. The woman nodded.

Genny wondered why the woman did not say anything, then a thought occurred to her. “You can’t speak?” The woman shook her head.

“Oh, sorry,” Genny replied, not knowing what else to say. “Will you take me where you took my brother, please?”

The woman smiled and nodded and started rowing the boat downstream. They soon entered a tunnel and rode through it for a long time. Unlike anywhere else Genny had been that day, the tunnel was completely dark and she wondered how the woman knew where she was going. However, because the woman was mute, there was no way to ask her, especially in the dark, so Genny waited patiently until they reached a lighted area once more where the woman rowed to shore and allowed Genny to disembark.

“Thank you,” Genny told her as she turned the boat around. The little red woman smiled and waved before starting back up stream, and Genny turned around to see where she was now.

Under and Over Arrest

As Genny walked away from the river, she found herself in a vast cavern with a sandy floor. The sand on the floor was very smooth except for a single pair of footprints which she decided had to have been left by Kas. Checking them against her own foot prints, she found them to be a bit smaller so she concluded her assumption was correct and she hurried on.

Halfway across the cavern, however, she was accosted by a pair of fish-headed people in blue uniforms. “Halt!” one of them burred at her.

Genny did not want to stop and instead told them, “I’m following my younger brother. I have to find him. Will you help me.”

“No!” the fish-man replied with a voice that sounded as if he was speaking in bubbles. “You are under arrest. You will come with us to stand trial for your crimes.”

“No!” Genny protested, “I have to find Kas.” And she ran away from the two fish-men. “What did I do anyway?” she shouted back over her shoulder.

“Halt!” one of the fish-men repeated. “You are under arrest.”

“Oh, Mommy and Daddy will be so angry if I don’t find Kas,” Genny worried, as she ran back and forth with the fish-men trying to catch her. After a minute or two of random running, Genny noticed that the fish-men were not able to keep up with her. They were not very fast runners. So she tried leading them around in a wide circle. Eventually, she managed to run around them and return to Kas’ trail, although they continued to chase her in their somewhat slower manner.

Kas' path led across the entire cavern and into a small passageway that soon opened up into a narrow natural porch and Genny abruptly found herself outside again, looking down on the clouds between her and the ground, somewhere below. It was then she realized her feet were no longer on firm ground but that she had come to a stop on thin air in much the same way her favorite cartoon characters might have.

"Halt!" the fish-men commanded her. "You are under arrest!"

Genny tried running again and found that even though she was no longer on the ground she could still move as though she was. Spotting Kas' footprint in the surface of a nearby cloud, she continued on the trail.

"How did Kas get down there, though?" she wondered and experimentally, she tried to fly and found that she did not need to use her legs to propel herself through the air. She could do that merely by thinking about it. She swooped down to stay closer to Kas' trail.

Behind her, however, she heard the wail of a siren getting closer. Looking back she saw the two fish-men following her in a black and white speedboat with a flashing light on her prow. "Boats aren't supposed to fly," she told herself and she struggled to stay ahead of the pursuing police fish-men, "but then I don't think I'm supposed to fly either."

The chase was a short one and they soon closed in on Genny and caught her in a large net. "You are under arrest," they told her yet again as they hauled in the net.

However, before they could turn the boat around and start back toward the cavern a pair of large eagles, also wearing blue uniforms, swooped down on them and screamed, "Stop! You are out of your jurisdiction!" One of the eagles was white in color and the other was brown.

"We chased this miscreant from our domain," one of the fish-men protested.

"Congratulations," the white eagle replied sarcastically, "So you managed to get rid of her, but you have no right of chase. Release her."

"She is our prisoner," the fish-man argued.

"Leave her with us or you will be ours," the white eagle countered. "This is our domain and you are not here with permission!"

Behind the fish-men, the cries of a dozen other eagles could be heard and being so obviously out-numbered they were forced to release Genny into the birds' custody. "You have not heard the last of this!" the lead fish-man warned the eagles. "We have the right of chase no matter where it takes us."

"Only in your law books, fishface," the eagle snapped at him, "not ours. Now scoot before we get hungry!" The fish-men turned their boat around and left at high speed.

"Will you help me find my brother?" Genny asked the eagles.

"No," the white eagle replied briskly, "You are under arrest and must stand trial for your crimes."

"What crimes?" Genny demanded even as they flew her up higher into the sky.

"Flying without a license just to start," the eagle replied.

“You need a license to fly?” Genny asked. “I didn’t know that.”

“Ignorance of the law is no excuse,” the eagle told her.

“But if I didn’t fly, I would have fallen,” Genny argued.

“Not my problem,” the eagle retorted.

They soon arrived at a massive, fortress-like structure on the top of an amazingly high cliff where Genny was escorted inside and into a holding cell, where it turned out Kas had already been placed.

“Genny!” Kas called happily.

“Oh, I’m so glad I found you Kas.”

“What’s happening, Genny?” Kas asked.

“Oh, these silly birds think we broke their laws or something,” Genny told him, shooting a withering look at their captors. The birds scowled back at her and then left the two children alone for a few minutes.

“Don’t worry, Kas,” Genny assured him. “Everything will be okay.”

“Promise?” he asked worriedly.

“Uh huh!” she replied with a nod.

The eagles returned a few minutes later to usher them into a large court room where they waited under guard for several more minutes until a judge – a large eagle wearing flowing black robes and a long white wig – arrived.

“All rise!” a bailiff eagle, wearing a colorful heraldic tabard, commanded as the judge entered the room. “The court of the Honorable Judge Gracious Spaulding IV is now in session! Be seated.” The children rose and sat on cue and waited for the judge to speak.

Judge Spaulding cleared his throat several times while looking at his agenda. “Two children caught trespassing and flying without licenses?” he muttered. “This is very serious. Very serious, indeed. Kids these days! They have no respect for the law.”

“We might show more respect for the law if it were posted properly,” Genny told him, then belatedly added, “Your Honor. If you did not want us here, you should have posted signs or established a customs station at their border or something like that instead of merely allowing us to stumble into your territory.”

“Silence until you are asked a question, child!” the bailiff snapped at her in the judge’s place.

“Now, now, Clearance,” the judge told the bailiff bird. “They are children after all. The real fault, I suppose, goes to their parents who brought them up so poorly.”

“What!” Genny protested. She had always been told what a good child she was and everyone, even the ambassadors, commented on her proper behavior.

“Silence in the court,” the judge told her casually, rapping an oversized gavel on his bench, producing a

sort of cracking, booming sound. “Now before we can get started properly, we need to know your names and have you swear to tell the truth. Bailiff?”

“Raise your right hand,” the bailiff instructed Genny, “and state your whole name.”

“Princess Genovya Petronelle Rosa Siluana of the House of Granova,” Genny replied.

“Royalty?” Judge Spaulding asked, obviously surprised.

“Yes,” Genny nodded, “and this is Crown Prince Ksaveras Vasili Eesidor Zakhariy, heir to the throne of Granom.” She indicated her brother.

“I prefer Kas,” Kas commented.

“This changes things,” Judge Spaulding commented. “As visiting royalty you have a certain immunity against prosecution under our laws although you should have presented yourselves to His Majesty immediately on entering his realm.”

“We were arrested immediately on entering his realm, Your Honor,” Genny replied reasonably.

“Well, you should have identified yourselves, but you are children so I suppose we can afford to be gracious.” He turned toward the bailiff again. “Clearance, please organize an honor guard to escort the prince and princess to the royal court.”

“Yes, Your Honor,” Bailiff Clearance replied politely.

“Court dismissed,” Judge Spaulding rapped his giant gavel again and the children were quickly escorted back out side and flown through the skies to another palatial structure.

The guards escorted them inside with Clearance now playing the part of a herald, crying the children’s names ahead of them as they progressed into the royal court. “Your Majesty! I have the honor of presenting Crown Prince Ksaveras Vasili Eesidor Zakhariy, heir to the throne of Granom and Princess Genovya Petronelle Rosa Siluana of the House of Granova. Proceed forward,” he instructed the children in a softer tone of voice.

They walked forward and knelt and curtsied before the throne and then waited for the king of the eagles to officially recognize them. The old bird on the throne looked at them for a long time before he spoke and at one point started making soft snoring noises that made Genny suspect he had fallen asleep. But then just as she wondered what to do next, he spoke.

“You are a prince and princess?” he asked.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Genny replied quickly, “from the Kingdom of Granom.”

“Granom, Granom,” the king eagle muttered. “Never heard of it. Must be a long way away. You don’t have wings,” he observed.

“Granomen don’t have wings, Your Majesty,” Genny explained. “We don’t normally fly, well not outside an airplane.”

“No wings,” the king repeated. “What sort of royalty has no wings and yick! You have no feathers

either, do you?"

"No, Your Majesty," Genny shook her head.

"You probably don't even like our raw meat and fish buffet," the king commented dismissively.

"We prefer to cook our food," Genny replied softly.

"Barbarians!" the king snapped at her. "We don't think you are royal at all."

"Of course we are," Genny protested. "Our daddy is the king."

"So you claim," the eagle monarch scoffed, "and presumptuously too. Be off with you and never enter my kingdom again! Take them away!"

Unhappy Trees

Genny and Kas, in spite of innumerable protests on their part, were roughly escorted from the palace and pushed off the cliff. This time, instead of being able to fly, however, they fell like stones. They fell and fell for a very long time until they finally landed softly on the leafy top of a large oak tree.

"Hey!" the tree complained. "What are you doing up there? Who do you think you are, falling on me like that?"

After the long fall and the events that had led up to it, Genny had used up any patience she had. "It's not like we had a say in the matter," she told the tree angrily. "If you want to get mad, get mad at the eagles. They're the ones who threw us on top of you."

"So you say," the tree retorted.

"Well it does sound like something an eagle might do," another tree chimed in. "They have no consideration for other life forms. Why did they drop you here?"

"Their king banished us for not having wings and therefore should not be able to fly," Genny responded, "I think."

"Well I ought to banish you for the same reason," the tree they were sitting on told them. "Get off my leaves!"

"That's not as easy as it sounds," Genny griped. "We're very high up and you're not an easy tree to climb."

"You don't have to climb," the tree scolded her. "Just fall the rest of the way to the ground."

"We could get hurt that way," Genny pointed out.

"That's not my fault," the tree replied petulantly. "You're too heavy for the branches you two are on. Get off!" And without waiting for them to move the tree whipped its upper branches around and threw them off.

“Hey!” an ash tree complained a moment later when they landed on it. “I didn’t say you could land on me!”

“You wouldn’t complain if I was a robin,” Genny retorted.

“Like you would know what it’s like to have them on your branches!” the ash told them and flung them back onto the oak.

“Oh no, you don’t!” the oak told them, tossing them immediately back at the ash.

“Uh uh!” the ash shook its branches and tossed them at a black birch.

“Hey!” the birch complained. “I was sleeping here.”

“I’m sorry!” Genny told it. “They threw us here. We just want to get down to the ground.”

“Then go there!” the birch told them, drooping its branches, forcing them to slide off. It was a bumpy ride down to the ground, but Genny landed on her feet and was able to turn around to try and catch Kas. He turned out to be too heavy for her and they both fell to the ground together but except for a few small scrapes and bruises they were unharmed. Genny was too angry at the trees to cry, but Kas who had born much of the brunt of the consequences of Genny losing her patience was unable to contain his tears. After a vallient attempt to hold them back, young Kas started crying with tears streaming down his face.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Kas!” Genny apologized immediately, putting her arms around him comfortingly. “Are you hurt?”

Kas cried a bit more, but bravely told her, “I’m okay.”

“You ripped your trousers,” Genny noted. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Uh huh,” Kas nodded as the last tears finished dripping from his chin. “You’re shirt’s ripped too.”

“Where?” Genny asked. Kas pointed at her sleeve. “Oh, it must have gotten caught on a branch.” She tore off the loose fabric and then noticed Kas’ face was dirty and tear-streaked, so she used it to clean him up a bit.

“Get off my roots!” the birch demanded.

“Oh shut it!” Genny shouted back at it and continued wiping Kas’ face. Then he took the rag and wiped her face in return. “I guess we both got a little dirty, huh?” she asked. Kas nodded and laughed which showed Genny more than anything else that he had not been hurt by the fall.

After a few minutes they got up and tried to find their way out of the forest, but there was no path in sight and the trees were not at all helpful. Just the opposite, in fact. They kept giving her conflicting advice unless they were complaining about the pain the children caused them by stepping on their roots.

“Stop complaining,” Genny finally snapped at a chestnut tree. “Nobody threw you at the ground or used you for a game of catch.”

“And nobody’s stepping on your toes either!” the chestnut retorted.

“I am,” Genny shot back as she and Kas moved on to annoy a nearby pine.

As the children wandered through the forest the trees started talking about them to each other so the complaints started happening even before either of them could have possibly stepped on the roots of the complainers.

Genny was prepared to ignore the complaints of the grouchy trees, but when they started throwing fruit, nuts and cones, they had to try running for cover. Fortunately it turned out that trees were not really very good at throwing things and after running for a few minutes they found themselves surrounded by a group of maples who turned out to have a sweeter disposition than some of the other trees in the forest.

“You’re safe here,” the maples assured them in unison.

“Don’t shield them,” a pair of oaks told the maples. “You don’t know what they have done.”

“Of course we do,” the maples replied. “The eagles threw them out of the domain of the air because such children don’t have wings, incidentally falling on one of you oaks. We cannot see what harm they have done to any of us.”

“They fell on us!” the oaks protested.

“Both of you?” the maples asked.

“Well, not us exactly,” one of the oaks admitted.

“And they stepped on our roots,” the other one added.

“Every animate creature in these woods steps on our roots,” the maples countered. “So what? It doesn’t hurt.”

“I have very sensitive roots,” one oak complained.

“Oh yeah, that one again,” a single maple sneered. “If your roots are all that sensitive, try growing them deeper.”

The trees argued a little longer but eventually Genny asked them to stop fighting and even offered to apologize to the oak with the sensitive roots. “There’s no need,” the maples assured her, “but we do think it is time to send you on your way home. If you turn toward the sun and keep walking in that direction you will find a path a few hundred yards away.”

“Oh,” Genny replied, “thank you! That’s just what we needed to know.”

“Good luck!” the maples bid them farewell.

Kas ran ahead of Genny as they made their way to the path, but Genny, unwilling to lose track of him again, managed to keep Kas in sight. “Let’s stay together,” she suggested when she finally caught up to him at the path.

“Okay,” Kas agreed.

They walked down the path together at a calm and measured pace because while it was a wide path, it was also a curved one and they were unable to see more than a dozen yards ahead. The forest of the cranky trees gradually gave way to one in which none of the trees spoke. Genny was uncertain if that was because these trees simply had nothing to say, were asleep, or if they were just plain incapable of speech. It was difficult to tell, she reflected, if they did not speak up and tell you why they were being quiet.

The forest they had fallen into had very little undergrowth but as they continued on, the incidence of smaller woody plants and thorny vines became more frequent. The path continued to travel in a wide circle and the trees were less and less frequent as the path became bordered by impenetrable masses of bushes and brambles.

“We’ve been walking in a circle a long time,” Genny noted after a while. “I wonder why we haven’t come back to where we started yet.” Kas shrugged a reply.

Painting the Macaque

The path continued to go in a wide circle, and yet somehow they never completed a loop. As they progressed, the briars and other undergrowth disappeared and were replaced by well trimmed privets.

“We must be getting closer to someone’s home, I think,” Genny told Kas.

“Tired,” Kas complained.

“Me too,” Genny agreed, “but we should probably find a nice place to stop first. Okay?”

“Kay,” Kas nodded.

Finally the path stopped going in circles and took a sharp left turn and started going straight, but only for a dozen yards or so when it turned right. After the second turn, there were two ways to go and Genny realized they were in a maze. There was no help for that and they started trying to find their way through the tangled passages. Finally they reached a small square shaped clearing, but the moment they stepped out and into it dozens of brightly colored rubber balls started bouncing toward them.

The balls seemed to have a life of their own and bounced repeatedly off each other and the children. “This is really quite annoying,” Genny remarked, trying to fend off a particularly obnoxious yellow ball that had taken to bouncing up and down on her head.

Kas was having similar troubles, but he knew instinctively how to handle the matter and started kicking the balls away as hard as he could. If he kicked them hard enough they got stuck in the hedges all around them. Genny saw what he was doing and started booting the rubber balls as well. She kicked a few a bit too hard and rather than getting lodged into the privets, they sailed over them completely, but after a few minutes all the balls were either out of sight or struggling to break free of the privet branches.

“I hope there aren’t many more like that,” Genny commented.

“Sleep here?” Kas asked.

“Too dirty and dusty,” Genny told him practically. “Let’s try a little further, maybe we’re near Auntie Fireiron’s house or we’ll find someone who can tell us where she is.”

The maze changed after the open area. While the passage kept turning either right or left, there were no further splits in the passage and no dead ends. They ran into the few stray balls Genny had kicked too hard rolling around in that part of the maze, but as the children approached, the balls rolled and bounced away from them as fast as possible. One even bounced through an open window that had been set in the hedge.

Genny looked at the strange window and then through it. On the other side there was a tall, majestic mountain with snow on its peak in the distance. Closer was a field of wild flowers, but when Genny leaned through the window, the other side turned out to be floating in the air at least one hundred feet above the ground. Far below, the ball was still bouncing away into the distance.

“I’ve had enough of flying and falling for one day,” she decided for that would have been the only way down to the ground and there were no trees, grouchy or otherwise, to catch her. She leaned back into the maze and closed the window.

After that there was another window each time the passage took a turn. The next window looked out into a vast desert with brown sand and bright green cacti all under a dull yellow sky. The window was closer to the ground on the other side this time, but the landscape did not appeal to Genny in the least.

The next window afforded them a bird’s eye view of a large modern city. At first Genny thought it might be Querna, but she could not see any familiar landmarks like the Wurra Palace or the University. The tall skyscrapers were the wrong colors as well.

After that they stopped at each of the windows and paused to look at active volcanoes, vast blue-green oceans, tropical islands and once the other side of a window seemed to open up on a sailing ship as she cut her way through a rolling ocean. Under another situation Genny would have wanted to explore the places on the other side of those windows, but now it was getting late and she was more concerned with getting back to Auntie Fireiron’s before her family started to worry.

She and Kas decided to stop looking through the windows and hurried on to wherever the path was taking them. Finally, they reached what Genny thought must be the center of the maze. The area was a wide, octagonal-shaped clearing with windows set in six of the sides. The path they entered the area from was on another and on the final wall there was a door.

The door had been set into a tall stretch of wall and there were two monkeys climbing an equally tall scaffold with brushes and buckets of paint. A small sign on the scaffold proclaimed, “Macaque & Macaque, Painting Contractors.”

The two monkeys began painting the wall as the children approached, laying on a smooth coat of a deep gray-green on the clapboards of the wall. They both worked with two brushes - one in each hand.

“Excuse me,” Genny called to them, “but where does this door go?”

The two monkeys turned around to face her, but as they did, one of them accidentally stroked his brush across the other’s face. The monkey with paint on his face immediately retaliated and the two creatures started painting each other with far more enthusiasm than they had shown in their work on the wall.

Genny attempted to get their attention, but they were too intent on painting each other, between occasional attempts to get back to the wall itself. “We’re meeting a lot of very silly animals today,” Genny observed and carefully walked under the scaffold and opened the door.

There was a single room beyond that door and like many of the rooms in Auntie Fireiron's house, it was a library, filled with books and a pair of comfortable chairs to sit or slouch in. Genny looked carefully, but could find no other way out of the room. "It looks like we're at another dead end, Kas," she commented.

"Kas?" she asked again, turning to see if he was still in the room. He was, but had curled up in one of the chairs and instantly fallen asleep. She thought that was probably a good idea. They were both very tired, but she still wanted to get back before her family worried about them. Leaving him in his chair she went back to see if she could talk to the monkeys, but they had given up all pretense of painting the wall and had climbed down the scaffolding and were now upending buckets of paint over each other, and then trying to smooth out the coat with their brushes. Finally, when they were out of paint, they screamed a pair of ear-splitting shrieks and ran off into the maze.

Genny turned back into the room and let the door close behind her. Taking a nap suddenly seemed like the only thing to do and she curled up in the second chair and promptly fell asleep.

The Adventure Ends

Genny was not certain how long she was asleep. It seemed like only moments had passed, but it must have been slightly longer because she discovered Kas had joined her in her chair and that she had wrapped one arm protectively around him.

She opened her eyes fully and sat up when the door opened again and their cousin Ksanya stepped into the room. Behind Ksanya, Genny saw not the hedge or the scaffolds or even the painted macaques, but a normal corridor and she recognized it as the one that led to the bedrooms in Auntie Fireiron's house.

"Oh!" Ksanya exclaimed. "There you guys are! We haven't seen you in hours. Did you two tire yourselves out?" Genny nodded and shook Kas gently to wake him up. "So what have you been up to all afternoon, huh?" Ksanya asked.

"Oh, just exploring," Genny replied.

"Sounds like fun," Ksanya laughed. "Did you guys have a good day?"

"Uh huh!" Genny replied, both smiling and nodding.

"Me too!" Ksanya told her. "Hmm, you must have had a really good time. You wore out your clothes in several spots. It's nearly time for dinner. Let's get you into something that isn't all torn and dirty and we'll go eat. You hungry?"

Both Genny and Kas nodded and followed their older cousin out of the room.

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