

The Lost Genie Diaries



J.H. Sweet

Clock Winders Series

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book are from the Revised Standard Version.

Clock Winders Series

Wind Horses and Horned Lions

Burnished Doves and Sky Serpents

Netherwind and Laurelstone

The Clock of the Universe

The Once and Forever Mountain

The Protector of Dragons

Time Key Travelers

The Promise of the Snow Gryphon

The Lost Genie Diaries

Spreesprites and Soul Shadows

The Bloodstone Miracles

Noontime in the Peacock Garden



“Instead of bronze I will bring gold, and instead of iron I will bring silver; instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron. I will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness.”

—Isaiah 60:17

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Introduction

The Lost Genie Diaries were found by the snow gryphon, Telános, in a secret library located in the cellar of an old farmhouse in Idaho that was abandoned after Torch Squads from Supercity Three discovered and burned the library. Telános had specifically gone to the farmhouse to gather ashes for an artist friend of his that liked to paint with ashes. With some of the burned book covers holding faint colors of green, amber, lilac, etc., Telános thought these might make lovely additions to Mr. Siegel's artwork. On the bottom of a singed shelf in one corner of the cellar, the snow gryphon spotted three tiny books, each around the size of a super-thick matchbook. These were not at all burned, nor even sooty; in fact, they were standing out amongst the ashes almost like pristine pieces of jewelry, with each book having a soft metallic sheen of a different color that included bronze, silver, and gold.

The three diaries were not lost in any permanent sense, just slightly forgotten about, particularly because genies often have more important things on their minds; and Telános had to consider that some things might be lost on purpose, just so they can be found by others, particularly because whose hands they end up in can often be very important.

Using a device called a magniplier to see the tiny print, Telános enjoyed reading the stories that were rather like fairy tales and fables, though all were completely true, being recordings of events that the genies were directly involved with. The twelve stories chosen for this book were some of Telános' favorites, and ones he read twice before donating the diaries to the Genie Library at Netherwind Manor, which was mainly used by puck trolls as a

source for puck-sized literature, though some other creatures also enjoyed the vast selection of books on a wide range of subjects.

In addition to not having specific dates attached to the individual entries, Genie Diaries generally don't list any specific authors, mainly because there are often several writers for each of the stories, which are often penned from great distances away by means of magical quills designed to connect back to specific books. If anyone were to find a diary-in-progress, he or she might observe the pages being filled with no genie present, as though being written by an invisible hand. And it is actually possible to observe this, as the books are often tucked away in the oddest of places, even some that humans can find such as dresser drawers, tree nooks, backpacks, and old attic trunks. However, while a genie might be halfway across the world when writing in one of these diaries, the three that Telános found were obviously penned by genies familiar with events in the United States, since many of the stories center around Doyle Mansion and the twin plantations (a.k.a. Netherwind and Laurelstone) in Alabama, as well as Lion Mountain in Tennessee, and a few U.S. Supercities, mothership communities, and other self-sustaining settlements.

Telános also selected a few poems from the three volumes. Not only do many genies write poetry, on a variety of subjects, they sometimes record the poems of others in their diaries, mainly anonymous ones that capture their fancy.

From the Bronze Diary



The Dumbwaiter

In the summertime of a certain year in the 1950s, a teenage girl named Frances Harrison was about to make an important discovery inside a mansion not too far from her home.

For the past year, Frances had been regularly visiting her friend, Gerard Doyle, at his home, mainly to make use of the large library situated on the second floor of Doyle Mansion, a three-story Victorian house that also had attic and basement spaces, as well as sprawling gardens on the estate that housed a gazebo, a garden shed, and an old carriage house that had recently been turned into a garage.

The Doyle family was in the process of building a huge subbasement library to house many special books currently being kept in trunks, boxes, cupboards, closets, the attic, sewing room, a rented storage building, two guest bedrooms, and the over-crowded second-floor library of the mansion. In addition to the research she was doing (mainly on magical creatures), Frances was helping Gerald shuffle books, categorizing and rearranging, in preparation for many going to the new library. Already, bins and boxes were being filled, labeled, and stacked.

After carrying loads of books up and down the many stairs of the mansion for several weeks, Frances decided to make use of the dumbwaiter, which had openings in the butler's pantry on the ground floor, in a second-floor bedroom down the hall from the library, and at the top of the servants' stairwell.

Being very sturdy and large enough to handle two good-sized kitchen trays, the dumbwaiter could easily haul about a hundred books, give or take, based on their sizes. And what a help this was,

since heavy loads no longer needed to be lugged up and down the stairs.

After using the dumbwaiter to move books for a full week, on a whim while standing in front of the opening in the butler's pantry, Frances decided to climb in and take herself for a ride.

So I won't have to climb the stairs, she thought.

She wasn't being lazy, because she truly didn't mind the stairs, but it was more that she just wanted to add a little variety and fun to her routine, which most people like to do as often as they can.

Frances could just fit into the dumbwaiter by crouching. In leaving the sliding door partway open, she found she could work the rope pulley system with ease. Thus, she was able to hoist herself up, and without even having to use too much muscle because the waiter was evidently very well designed to run smoothly and without too much noise.

However, after coming to a stop outside the second-floor bedroom, a small idea in the back of her brain told her to keep going, up to the third floor, where she exited the waiter by climbing out onto the servants' stairs.

While she had always thought it odd that the third-floor opening of the dumbwaiter was not in a bedroom, her brain had decided it was probably a matter of convenience to have one of the openings in the stairwell; and perhaps whoever had done the house plans had decided that the third-floor bedroom at that end of the hall didn't need a dumbwaiter service.

Without thinking much else about the various openings, she then lowered the empty waiter back down to the butler's pantry, afterwards trotting downstairs in order to load it up with books.

Later in the day, Frances confessed to Gerard that she had taken a ride in the dumbwaiter. Smiling, he ended up telling her that he had done this several times over the years.

The next day, which happened to be a Tuesday, when Frances was unloading stacks of books in the second-floor bedroom, she happened to glance up inside the dumbwaiter shaft. In addition to

seeing light on the third floor from the servants' stairs that had two good-sized windows in the hall to let in daylight, she saw a broad crack of light coming from the wall opposite the stairwell.

So there must be an opening of some sort in that end bedroom after all, her brain told her. Maybe it's behind a wardrobe.

But then it wouldn't let light in, her mind answered as she headed upstairs to investigate.

Maybe a standing mirror hides the dumbwaiter, this suggestion coming into her brain just as she was opening the bedroom door.

Inside the room, she was baffled because the wall in question held nothing more than wallpaper and a portrait of one of Gerard's aunts. Checking behind a writing desk sitting in one corner yielded nothing, as expected, since neither the desk nor its chair were the right shapes to conceal much of anything.

From the window of the bedroom, Frances could see Gerard weeding in the garden.

It must have been light from the servants' stairs that I saw reflecting on the wall, she ended up deciding. Except she had been pretty sure the source was not the stairwell.

Making her way back down to the second-floor bedroom, the mystery was still on her mind.

Removing the last stack of books, Frances again put her head into the dumbwaiter and looked up, surprised, as well as still baffled. *It's still there! And it's not from the stairs! So where is the light coming from?*

To figure this out, the simplest solution seemed to be to climb in and investigate. And so she did, hoisting herself lickety-split up to the third floor, where she first had a quick peek into the stairwell through the door she was familiar with that was standing open about two inches. After the peek, she checked the other side, which contained another doorway, this one also open about two inches and through which light was making its way into the dumbwaiter shaft. Fully expecting to find a room in the house, Frances pushed the door

fully open, only to find herself looking at a stretch of trees instead of a room.

While she was startled, Frances was not at all afraid, instead being more filled with curiosity than anything else; though she was a little sweaty and nervous over the excitement of the find and the anticipation of exploring.

Both the sweat and nervousness vanished as she climbed out of the dumbwaiter and met a cool breeze coming through the trees in what amounted to a sizeable copse situated alongside a country lane, the other side of which held grassy fields dotted with trees, shrubs, various stones, patches of wildflowers, and a distant pond.

Frances had emerged from a wooden door in the trunk of a huge oak tree not unlike several grandfather oaks in the vicinity of Doyle Mansion. Leaving the door open several inches so she could easily find it again later, she made her way to the country lane, somehow instinctively knowing to take the road left.

As she walked, she passed trees with unusual spiraling branches adorned with greenery resembling flowers more than leaves. Large stones alongside the lane seemed faintly to hold the shapes of animals like bears and elephants, with juts and crevices suggesting their faces, ears, toes, and other details.

After a few twists and turns of the lane, which amounted to a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the copse containing the dumbwaiter tree, Frances came to a sturdy iron gate of a scrolling design that was just wide enough to stretch across the lane, but that was standing open, as though inviting her to enter.

Beside the gate, next to a rounded hedge, sat a small gatehouse of a two-story stone tower design that was so tiny it reminded Frances of a child's playhouse, but for a very small child since none but a toddler could have stood upright inside the tower on either of the two floors.

While the gatehouse seemed currently unoccupied, through a window Frances did spy several pieces of tiny furniture including a

divan, a desk-and-chair set, a cupboard, and a bed that were all way too small for a toddler.

So if this is a playhouse, her mind decided, the furniture must be for the child's dolls or small stuffed animals.

Since the iron gate somewhat reminded Frances of the back gate at Doyle Mansion, she wondered if this was someone's private estate. However, as she continued down the lane expecting to find a mansion, or maybe a ranch house, she instead found herself in a village setting surrounded by homes of much-varied sizes and designs.

Mixed with types of houses Frances was familiar with (like bungalows and Tudors) were many odd dwellings such as one resembling a long haystack with gingerbread-style windows, and another that appeared to be made of about forty fruit crates and baskets put together.

Next to a stout cottage with a red picket fence sat a home shaped like an igloo, but made of masses of flowering vines, some thick like wisteria and some thin like honeysuckle. The flowers were of different vibrant sorts growing on the same vines.

Looking around her in wonder, Frances might have missed a knee-high house made of something resembling milkweed strands, except for her eye being drawn to glints of sunlight bouncing off the dazzling-white structure that had star-shaped window cut-outs and a door shaped like a quarter moon.

Nearby, the entry flap of a yurt that was but shoulder high on Frances was tied open. Peering inside the tent, she discovered four little bunkbeds, currently unoccupied, as were two couches and eight chairs surrounding a dining table.

Just past a small cabin, and leaning against a stone wall, was a wide ladder with little houses situated on each rung. *Like maybe a bird apartment complex?* her mind speculated.

As a blue butterfly as large as her head drifted by in front of the ladder, Frances decided, *Okay...I've wandered into a sort of fairyland.*

This didn't surprise her. She had a gryphon named Zapor assigned to her by God as a protector, and a puck troll lived in her home. With puck trolls being drawn to artistic people and things, Deena had taken up residence with the Harrisons specifically because Frances' father liked to build wooden model ships, generally from scratch. Plus, Frances was always on the hunt for gnomes and unicorns. So it didn't surprise her at all that God was letting her have a visit to a special little place that looked very well as though it might be inhabited by magical creatures; except, other than the enormous butterfly, she hadn't noticed any yet.

That's because you're moving around too much and not really paying attention, a little voice in the back of her mind told her. (This happened to be the Holy Spirit, tapping into what Frances' brain was already starting to reason out by this time.)

Whenever she was distracted or in a hurry, it often helped for her to simply sit still and say a small prayer, asking for God to help her slow down, relax, and be observant to anything He might want to show her.

A stone bench was situated directly across from the wide ladder. Taking a seat, Frances closed her eyes to pray. Opening them after a couple of minutes, she took a deep breath while slowly looking around. Less than ten seconds later, in a flower bed next to the milkweed house, she spied a rain ripple curled up around the thick stem of a flower that appeared to be something of a cross between a zinnia and a gladiola.

Having learned about rain ripples from her research into magical creatures, Frances easily recognized the little salamander-shaped ripple whose body was mostly translucent and silvery, but also held streaks of soft color that looked as though they might have been splashed on it from a pastel rainbow.

The ripple had been there all along; she simply hadn't noticed it until she decided to sit and be observant. Nor had she noticed, until now, all of the unique flowers in the bed, many of them extremely interesting in shape and color.

Unknown to Frances, another magical creature was also very nearby, this being a puck troll named Turo who lived in a den in a woodpile about twenty feet from the stone bench. Turo had just climbed to the top of the woodpile. Accessing an acorn from a stash in the pile, he threw the nut at Frances who was only startled for about two seconds after it hit her shoulder because she easily recognized the thrower.

Puck trolls, of course, love to throw things; and most of the time, the throwing isn't malicious. It's just a skill they are born with that they must practice throughout their lives in order to be able to defend themselves, if necessary, against evil creatures like hobgoblins and gremlins. Plus, since puck trolls don't speak, throwing things can help get the attention of others, which was Turo's main intent on this day.

"Hello, you're a puck troll," Frances said, stating the obvious, though the little puck was quite amazed that she knew about his kind.

In knowing quite a bit about his kind, Frances hadn't at all been surprised by the acorn. Nor was she perturbed. "I'm Frances," she added, smiling.

Although Turo didn't smile back, he did climb down from the woodpile and trot over to the bench, picking up a stick as he came. In the soft earth beside the bench, he used the stick to write his name in the dirt.

"Turo, that's a nice name," Frances responded.

Shrugging nonchalantly, the puck gave a small nod. He liked his name well enough.

"What is this place?" Frances suddenly thought to ask.

Again using the stick, Turo scratched out one word.

"Ancora," Frances read. "That's a nice name too."

Scrambling up one leg of the bench, Turo, sat beside the visitor for a time as the pair watched several butterflies float by including an orange one and two yellows with long tails that were even larger than the blue one Frances had seen earlier.

“Bright pink!” she suddenly exclaimed. “That’s a little strange for a butterfly.”

Again, Turo shrugged half-heartedly, as he didn’t particularly think so, having seen many pink butterflies in his time. Still having the stick with him, he slowly twirled it with one hand, absentmindedly.

Suddenly remembering something he wanted to check on, the puck stood up and swiftly slid down the bench leg to set off at a lope down the lane.

“Bye!” Frances called to the little troll who ended up throwing the stick at her. Deftly catching it with her left hand, she waved with her right as she smiled.

Returning the wave, Turo also ended up returning the smile, mainly because he was pleased that she was such a good sport about having things thrown at her. Many creatures were not such good sports about these sorts of things.

In truth, Frances was becoming quite a good catcher of late, having gained much practice at home from Deena regularly throwing things like thimbles, buttons, cherry tomatoes, matchboxes, and other small objects at her.

Just catching a glimpse of an enormous furry blue rodent, about the size of a hassock, crossing the lane in front of the vine-igloo house, Frances suddenly realized her stomach was growling because she was hungry for lunch. It had just been coming up on noon back at the mansion when she decided to investigate the odd crack of light in the dumbwaiter shaft.

Rising from the bench and heading in the direction of the gate, she looked for the rodent that she would later come to know as an enormouse. However, the creature had well disappeared into a large patch of shrubbery and deep blossoming groundcover in a garden situated between two Victorian cottages.

Intent on reaching the dumbwaiter oak, because she could feel lunch at the mansion calling to her, Frances passed the gatehouse quickly, at a speed-walk basically. In going fast, she failed to notice

that the tower was now occupied, by a genie named Breccan who from a window watched the girl go from speed-walk to jog as she disappeared down the lane in the direction of what he knew to be a magical doorway between realms. Indeed, genies had built the dumbwaiter in the mansion, so its secrets couldn't help but be well known to many of them.

As she easily found the door in the tree and climbed into the waiter, Frances eagerly thought, *Turkey sandwiches and fruit salad*, based on what Gerard had mentioned earlier. While she didn't think he would have waited lunch, she knew he would have made a sandwich for her as well, probably thinking her to be out of earshot in either the attic or the basement.

However, upon lowering the dumbwaiter down to the butler's pantry, climbing out, and entering the kitchen, she found no signs of lunch. Peering out the window over the sink and into the garden, she noticed Gerard still weeding in the exact spot she had observed him in earlier from the upstairs bedroom window. Glancing at the kitchen clock, she was shocked to discover that it was still five minutes until noon.

So no time at all passed while I was gone, she realized, sitting down at the kitchen table.

This was not exactly correct because a small amount of time had passed while Frances was in Ancora, three minutes to be exact. And she would end up discovering this to be true of each of her subsequent visits. No matter how much time she spent in that magical land, she would always return home to exactly three minutes having passed.

But time definitely passed for my stomach, she realized, heading to the refrigerator to begin making the sandwiches and dishing up the fruit salad. Gerard came in to wash up just as she was laying the table with napkins and silverware, and pouring glasses of iced tea for them.

Not only was Frances eager to eat, she was anxious to make a few notes in her journal about the dumbwaiter and about Ancora.

However, as she dug into her sandwich (before Gerard even made it to the table), she could hear a little voice in the back of her mind telling her that the journal notes weren't a good idea. Nor was she supposed to tell anyone about her discovery. In fact, the Holy Spirit was telling her very strongly to keep both the doorway and Ancora a secret even from Gerard, at least for now. God had definitely shown Frances something incredibly special, but it was something that other people shouldn't know about at this time.

Sometimes secrets are okay, she decided, specifically thinking about the subbasement library.

Other than select friends and family members, many of whom were in the construction business, no one knew about the massive project taking form beneath Doyle Mansion. Frances' two brothers had been hired to help Gerard's uncle build many of the library bookshelves, as well as curio cabinets to house certain artifacts being collected by Gerard's father. However, the entire Harrison family had been sworn to secrecy over the library.

While Frances might have been tempted to feel guilty over not telling Gerard about something incredibly wonderful she had discovered inside his house, she had to consider that he was in the know about many other amazing secrets the house held, such as a hidden wall niche in the master bedroom, and the spiral slide leading from the second-floor library to the basement, accessed by a trap door in the floor of the library, with the landing at the bottom situated behind a hidden panel in the wall of the basement.

As surprised as Frances had been to discover the secret doorway in the dumbwaiter, she was equally surprised the next day, Wednesday, to find no sign of it, at all.

Although she rode the dumbwaiter three times that day, and thoroughly checked, the only opening on the third floor was the one in the servants' stairwell. However, several times during the day she found her eye drawn to a calendar hanging on a wall in the butler's pantry; and she was smart enough to realize this might mean

something, especially because she was positive she hadn't imagined her adventure on the previous day.

Maybe Ancora can't be visited on Wednesdays, she thought, which she would end up reasoning about Thursdays as well.

However, being persistent in checking, she discovered the doorway present on Friday. Again, it was nearing noon, so she slipped two slices of banana bread into a sandwich bag, which she then placed into a side pocket of her dungarees before once again making a visit to Ancora.

Not being hungry or otherwise distracted, Frances managed this time to notice that the gatehouse was occupied, again by Breccan who introduced himself to the visitor simply by floating out one of the tower windows to hover at shoulder level in front of her as he gave his name and received Frances' in reply.

He also told her he was a genie, since she didn't quite know what he was. Being around the size of a puck troll, she had thought he might be a brownie, except she didn't think brownies could fly since the ones she had read about in storybooks over the years didn't have wings. Because Breccan didn't either, it made sense to her brain for him to be a genie. She would come to discover that he, like all genies, could also appear and disappear at will very quickly, which is why genies are seldom observed, and why some people believe them to be invisible, an incorrect assumption as genies are merely incredibly fast, when they want to be, including too fast for the human eye to see.

"What a lovely little world this is!" Frances exclaimed.

"I'd call it more of a realm," Breccan answered. "But, yes, most parts of it are very nice; though it's not all that 'little' acreage-wise, being in total around the size of Greenland."

To this information, Frances was wide-eyed and speechless for a time, as she followed the floating genie down the lane to the village she had earlier visited.

"So, you're in charge here, like a mayor or something?" Frances asked.

Smiling, Breccan responded, “Something like that. I man the gate and watch over things, to keep all of the magical beings here safe.”

“Safe from what?” Frances had to ask.

“Various things,” Breccan replied, “sometimes from sickness, the occasional fierce storm, sometimes from each other, but mainly from outside forces.”

“Don’t worry,” Frances said, “I won’t let anything bad in through the dumbwaiter doorway. And I wasn’t even planning to tell anyone about it, or Ancora.”

“Very wise for right now,” Breccan said, also then confirming for her that the doorway was only present in Doyle Mansion on Tuesdays and Fridays.

He also told her genies had added the dumbwaiter about twenty years after the mansion was built, with the permission of Gerard’s grandfather, who definitely saw the advantage of both dumbwaiters and magical doorways. Based on genie magic, the construction only took a few hours and had occurred when the family was away for a weekend, so as to keep the genies’ involvement a secret from most people.

“Even at that time, just like now, many dangers existed for genies in your world,” Breccan said. “So certain people like old Mr. Doyle were definitely interested in helping to protect us.”

“What dangers?” Frances asked as they approached the first little cluster of village dwellings.

“Sorcerers and Genie Hunters,” Breccan replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

While Frances had heard of sorcerers, she didn’t particularly know they existed in the world of today. And she had never heard of Genie Hunters who evidently worked for the sorcerers.

“There are more of them than you might think in your world,” Breccan said sadly. “That’s why there aren’t many genies.”

“So the magical creatures here are in danger too, like you,” Frances mused.

“Some,” Breccan admitted, “but they’re mostly here because there’s not enough food for them in your world at this time.”

With Frances following her floating friend onto a little side lane adjacent to the haystack house, as they just were passing a tall hedge, the pair paused to have a peek through a round window cut into the hedge. Through the window, Frances was amazed to see an extensive winter wonderland in which three snow gryphons were frolicking in mounds of powdery snow.

When the smallest of the three noticed the audience at the window, he bounded over and said to Frances, “Won’t you join us? We’re about to build a fort.”

“I’m afraid I’m not really dressed for the snow,” Frances replied, “but thank you for the invite.”

“Maybe some other time,” the gryphon said, before bounding back to his two friends.

Again following Breccan along the lane, Frances asked, “Couldn’t people grow food for them?”

“Oh, I thought you knew,” the genie replied. “Magical creatures feed on the goodness in mankind, and there’s just not enough of it right now to sustain them. Some of them eat other kinds of food, but it’s not what keeps them alive. Most of the ones here would starve fairly quickly in your world.”

Feeling sad, Frances was silent for a time after hearing this.

“Ancora is like a waiting spot,” Breccan eventually went on. “In the future, when there is more goodness in your world, many of the creatures here will be able to go live there.”

As she and Breccan passed a tall dome-shaped dovecote, Frances noticed several super-shiny doves inside, sleeping and cooing softly, their feathers holding many colors along with a metallic sheen. Although she didn’t know these were dragons, she did know there was something very special about the colorful sleeping doves.

A little farther along the lane, they came upon a round house about two-feet high that resembled a huge coconut. According to Breccan, this was the home of a snieff.

Peering in through a tiny window, Frances spied a little spikey purple creature.

“Snieffs like to live in gardens,” Breccan added, “along with bugbrites, snoils, hairy vetches, enormice, pill-bottom turtles, and woolly crotons.”

As Turo suddenly appeared in the tree fringe beside the lane, throwing a pine cone at Breccan and a walnut at Frances, the genie added, “Even though puck trolls like gardens, they usually live in dens in people’s houses.”

“I know,” Frances said with a smile, though at this time she didn’t share with Breccan that she actually had a puck troll living in her house.

As Turo joined the girl and genie on the lane, Frances gave him one of her slices of banana bread.

Declining the offer of the other, Breccan smiled and said, “You evidently know other things about puck trolls too.” (Such as how very much they like people food.)

Eyes wide as he munched, Turo basically decided he had never had such a wonderful treat.

They came next to a grassy field in which Frances had her first glimpse of a wind horse that was hovering about ten feet above the ground. This was a creature she was not yet familiar with from her research; and she absolutely thought the soft and shimmering orange, rose, gold, purple, peach, and blue colors of the horse—that resembled those of many dawns and sunsets—to be the loveliest in the world.

“There are hardly any of them in your world right now,” Breccan told her. “You know how horses eat a lot. Well, the same is true of wind horses. So they would need a lot of human goodness to sustain them.”

On the far side of the field, the genie pointed out a nature spirit to the visitor. This was a sand wisp that looked like a skinny, slow-moving dust devil with trailing tendrils.

“There aren’t many nature spirits here,” Breccan said. “They can live in your world because God feeds them through nature, the energy in nature.”

“How does God feed the magical creatures here?” Frances suddenly thought to ask, since she hadn’t seen any humans yet, other than herself.

“That’s a secret, I’m afraid,” the genie answered. “I’m sorry, I can’t tell you.”

“I understand,” Frances replied.

Though she didn’t speculate aloud, she assumed there must be people somewhere in Ancora. In a place as large as Greenland, there’d be plenty of room for them.

And they must be good people, she thought, to be able to feed so many magical creatures.

“There was a dryad living in that glade over there,” Breccan pointed and said as they moved on, “but I haven’t seen her lately.”

Strolling along, as Frances looked up, she saw a bird flitting about amongst the clouds that very much looked like a cloud itself.

Her gaze drawn back down as they passed along the edge of a pond, she noted a fish of golden colors that resembled a bird in that he seemed to have feathers for scales and wings instead of side fins. Jumping out of the pond, the creature hovered in front of Frances and Breccan—its wings beating very fast, like those of a hummingbird, and flinging droplets of water that glistened like jewels in the sunshine—before diving back into the water a few moments later with a slurping splash.

The side lane evidently made a loop, coming out not too far from the stone bench in the village. As Breccan headed off on some business for the day, Turo sat on the bench with Frances who ended up splitting the second piece of banana bread with him, after which, she decided to head home.

In being grateful for the treats, Turo didn't end up throwing another walnut at Frances as she departed, though he had intended to and had one handy. Instead, he simply waved to her as she glanced back smiling and fluttering a hand.

At home in the evening, as she was praying and reading the bible, Frances chanced upon Jeremiah 33:3, which she felt perfectly fitted the find of Ancora. "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things which you have not known."

She had lately been asking God to help her find out more about magical creatures. He had more than answered her prayers, as she had only expected Him to lead her to more books on the subject. Now, she was getting to see some of these wondrous creatures firsthand.

Frances made her third visit to Ancora the following Tuesday, where Breccan again showed her some of the sights.

In a hedged garden not too far from the gatehouse, she saw a magical turquoise bush whose leaves were sizzling with little pops of effervescence very like the top of a freshly-poured soda. Also in the garden was a shrub with white, lily-shaped flowers from which strings of lilting musical notes were issuing.

"Magical plants feed on the hope in mankind," Breccan said as they listened to the song. "Good magical plants, that is, because bad ones feed on despair."

"Are there gnomes here?" Frances asked, in thinking about the many gardens and who might be tending them.

"A few," Breccan answered. "But they're mostly living in another place for right now."

"What about unicorns?" Frances couldn't help but ask, since this was the creature she was most interested in as far as her research.

"No, there are none here," Breccan replied, smiling, since he knew quite a lot about unicorns, whereas, to most people, they were a complete mystery. Noting the eagerness on Frances' face, he couldn't resist giving her a little hint. "If you're looking for

unicorns in your world, I can tell you that the bible holds the key to finding them.”

With Breccan needing to be off on some business for the day, Frances again sat on the stone bench, where Turo ended up joining her. Together, they watched two grimmpts (colorful little piglets with wings) digging side-by-side in the dirt a short ways down the lane.

Turo had a sketch pad with him that was a little over a quarter of an inch thick with each of the pages being roughly half the size of a standard playing card. He also had a little pencil box containing slivers of charcoal with which he liked to draw.

At Frances’ urging, he showed her some of his sketches—of flowers, cottages, birds, gryphons, and such—which were very good, and incredibly detailed.

Pointing to the trunk of a nearby enormous oak tree, Turo scrawled a word on one of his blank pages.

“A thunderbird, where!?” Frances exclaimed, as she at first couldn’t see the bird whose form was perfectly melded with the wide tree trunk.

As Turo again pointed, her eyes eventually found the enormous creature; and Frances could hardly believe she could have missed him for as large as he was, nearly eight feet tall while sitting. Since his eyes were closed, Frances assumed he was napping while sitting.

After admiring the thunderbird for a time, Frances again watched the grimmpts who were digging even more furiously than before; and she found herself reciting a bible verse that had suddenly come to mind. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.”

“Ecclesiastes 4:9,” Turo wrote on the sketch pad. He loved to read and was very familiar with many parts of the bible, his favorite parts being the exciting accounts of various battles.

In pondering the grimmpts and the quote, Frances suddenly thought of Deena at home. She didn’t have anyone to help her.

Zapor at least had his cousin, Folto, around most of the time. But Deena was pretty much all alone.

“It’s nice to have someone to help with toil,” Frances mused.

The grimmpts aren’t toiling, they’re playing, came a thought suddenly placed into her brain.

To Frances’ start and exclamation of “Who said that?” Turo again pointed to the thunderbird, who evidently hadn’t been asleep and whose eyes were now open and upon her.

Frances hadn’t known that thunderbirds could communicate telepathically, though she didn’t know why she should be surprised by this because gryphons could too, except they most often preferred to speak aloud.

While she might have missed seeing the thunderbird at first, Frances couldn’t miss the flashy golden gryphon that landed directly beside the bench and introducing himself as Plantar. The thunderbird’s name was evidently Boesch.

“I thought I might show you around some,” Plantar said, “since Breccan is busy right now.”

“I was thinking about heading down that way for a bit,” Frances stated, pointing to the start of a somewhat shadowy lane near the spot where the grimmpts were still digging.

“Umm...we...maybe don’t want to go down there,” Plantar said slowly.

Breccan didn’t say she couldn’t go down there, Boesch said. *I’ll take her, if you won’t.*

“No, no, I’ll go,” the gryphon said, though in a slightly perturbed manner. “I just don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“What’s down there?” Frances asked.

The Darkling Village, Boesch answered.

“Scary things like gremlins and warcsies,” Plantar added.

Frances had heard of gremlins but not warcsies.

Bigger than gremlins, not invisible, but with more teeth and claws, hairy warts on their feet, long fingers, big nostrils, humps on their back... Boesch told her.

Turo had been speedily sketching a warcsie.

“Ew! Yuck! ” Frances said as he showed her the picture. “Will you come too?” she suddenly asked of the little artist, who readily agreed. “With you along, I won’t be scared.”

While he didn’t show it, Turo was pleased to be counted as something of a protector along with the gryphon.

Boesch evidently wasn’t going; in fact, he needed to be off. Nodding farewell to Frances, he vanished in a split second in a rumble of thunder as he took to the skies.

The Darkling Village lay about a quarter of a mile down the shadowy lane.

“So this is where the not-so-nice creatures live,” Frances said, as they approached the first cluster of houses that mainly looked like mud huts.

A few caves dotted a stretch of rocky hills behind the huts. Craggy trees crowded against the cave entrances that were overhung with weedy vines. Thick, low-hanging gray clouds blanketed the village, adding an air of gloom to the place. What struck Frances the most, aside from the darkness and gloom, was the emptiness of the village.

“It is nearly empty,” Plantar agreed when she mentioned this. “There used to be lots of hobgoblins, fire slugs, gremlins, warcsies, and even hellhounds.”

Frances was almost afraid to ask where they all went, but eventually she did.

Somewhat sadly, Plantar told her, “There’s plenty for them to eat in your world. You see, while good magical creatures feed on goodness, the bad ones feed on the evil in the world.”

Plantar had said “nearly empty” because there were still a handful of residents in the Darkling Village such as a creature called a didymo that looked like a rock oozing globs of pale yellow slime. Turo ended up shooing away something like a scaly snail that was evidently called a filtz.

Behind a set of stables, Plantar showed Frances two pens of orclings, totaling eighteen in all, that Breccan was evidently taming. Turo ended up being the one to explain, by an elaborate mime routine, that orcs tamed as orclings ended up doing good deeds, basically performing chores for others.

“So there’s still hope here,” Frances mused, “even though the village holds darklings, and even though it’s nearly empty from so many of them coming to our world because we’re feeding them so well.”

Turo was nodding because he fully agreed. The orclings did represent hope, which he knew to be present everywhere in the universe, even in dark places holding much evil.

While the Darkling Village was interesting, Frances was relieved to return to the setting of what she now termed the Brightling Village, since it didn’t have an official name like the darker one. Feeling a need to be heading home, she was just saying goodbye to Plantar and Turo when an extremely odd creature darted out from amongst a patch of tall garden flowers alongside the path.

“A risible,” Plantar stated to the surprised and questioning look on Frances’ face.

The surprise was mainly because she couldn’t imagine any creature being put together in such an absurd way. Though he had three legs with meaty paws, he was actually walking on gigantic ears. His face was on his stomach (like where a bellybutton might have been), and his curling tail held multicolored stripes going longways instead of being ringed. Having both fur and feathers, his body was also colorful, except when laughing it seems, which he started to do, rather raucously, upon seeing Frances.

Losing all color and turning completely white, the risible continued to laugh until Plantar, while bidding a hasty farewell to Frances, led him away. In truth, the risible was laughing because he never could have imagined any creature being put together like Frances.

Turo was simply shaking his head, while contemplating that he might later throw a few dirt clods at the risible, who was frequently an annoyance to many of the residents of the village, in often being loud at night and sometimes carelessly bumping into smaller houses like Turo's den in the woodpile.

Though Frances figured out she was being laughed at, she didn't mind, particularly in being completely fascinated with the risible. Waving goodbye to Turo, she hastened home to have a lunch of chicken noodle soup and apple slices with Gerard.

After Frances left the village, Turo decided to draw a picture of her. She was taller than he had imagined a young person to be. Except for when he was little and didn't remember (because he was toddler age), Turo hadn't ever seen any other humans.

In truth, Frances was taller than most girls her age, so the little puck wasn't getting any kind of a "standard" picture of a teenage girl. But whatever the standard, the picture he drew turned out lovely because Turo thought Frances to be very pretty, especially on the inside, which always shows through to the outside.

The next time the doorway was available again, on Friday, Frances made her fourth visit to Ancora.

Again, she met up with Breccan who showed her a large field containing about fifteen rabbits that Frances didn't know were really behemoths, since none of them shapeshifted to become behemoths while she was present and watching.

Not feeling inclined to ask questions, Frances simply assumed Breccan wanted to show her a few regular creatures on this day. In truth, the field also held what appeared to be double-sized pecan trees bearing what looked to be quadruple-sized nuts, the trees and their fruit being quite a spectacular sight to behold. In cracking and eating one of the nuts that had fallen to the ground and lost its hull, Frances felt she had never tasted such a wonderful pecan.

As the pair headed into the Brightling Village, Frances told Breccan that her school was starting again the next week. "So I won't be able to come back for a while."

Nodding as they entered the village, he answered with, “I figured that.” After a short pause, he added, “You know, part of my job here is to decide when the magical creatures can go to your world to live. And one can go back with you today, if you like.”

“Really, wow!” Frances said with excitement.

“You can take your pick,” Breccan went on, “but I recommend against a wind horse, because of how much they need to eat.”

“Okay,” she replied, noting on a nearby tree limb a tiny bird about the size of a spool of thread that was fluorescent orange and blue and had a curling tail at least three feet long.

Plantar was nearby and had heard what Breccan said about someone going back with Frances, as had many others in the village. Indeed, a lot of hopeful eyes were upon Frances as she looked about, noting for the first time a giant shell house from which two eyeballs perched upon antennae were peering out. Several rain ripples clutching stems of tall flowers were leaning towards her, but were overshadowed by a hairy vetch bouncing about on a large garden stone in an effort to get her attention. Frances also spied Boesch, again by the wide tree trunk.

“Don’t worry about picking a large creature,” Breccan went on, “because there are more doorways to your world than just the one in the dumbwaiter, and some of them are quite large.”

“Oh, how interesting,” Frances replied, though she wasn’t really thinking about doorways, but more about how to make a good choice.

The risible was nearby, and was not laughing; in fact, he looked as serious and hopeful as most of his fellow residents. An enormouse was brave enough to come up to Frances and rub against her shins. He seemed very loveable, as did a grimmpt snuffling in the dirt next to the wide ladder. However, something was telling her these were not the right choices.

Turo was standing beside the bench, looking down at his toes. Having noticed Frances’ interest in the risible on her last visit, he was guessing that might be her pick.

While the village at present was rather quiet, Frances could actually hear the Holy Spirit speaking to her very loudly, though not in her ears, but more in her heart and brain, giving her the nudge she needed to make the perfect choice.

“Turo, I choose Turo,” she said right away after the nudge, “if he doesn’t mind coming back with me through the dumbwaiter doorway.”

Looking up from his toes in surprise, Turo was more than agreeable, though he tried very hard not to appear too agreeable, but more nonchalant. And, by outward appearances, he did manage to put on a good show of being casual, though he was practically jumping up and down inside. While he hadn’t thought she would pick him, he had hoped that she might.

It didn’t take Turo long to pack up a little duffle bag into which he placed mostly clothing, but a few other items as well such as his pencil box. He carried his sketch pad separately since it wouldn’t fit into the bag.

Frances carried Turo and his belongings on her shoulder for the trip to the doorway in the tree; and as they departed the village, the little puck waved goodbye to his many friends, the ones with arms waving to him as well.

Inside the dumbwaiter, Turo remembered a bible quote he was fond of, Proverbs 13:12, which seemed to perfectly fit how he felt at this moment. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

And, indeed, he did feel full of life, though he was a little nervous about what his new home might end up being like. Whatever it might be like, it would be a new adventure.

The world Turo discovered ended up being even more exciting to him than what Frances had felt upon finding Ancora. While he was sometimes sad about those who had been left behind for now, he was hopeful for them. If more people decided to be good, more magical creatures could always come.

Turo instinctively knew (from God telling him) that part of his job in this new world was to keep darklings in check, the really bad ones mainly, because not all darklings were truly bad. Some, like ballybogs, were basically on the fence, being more mischievous than bad. So too had Turo once read a story about a gremlin that liked to fix things, rather than breaking them.

Aside from keeping darklings in check, Turo would need to help and protect people, most of whom had no idea what pucks were capable of as far as their magical skills. But many would eventually find out; and the truly brainy ones would not even be surprised to discover such a smallish creature to be probably five hundred times more powerful than even the strongest of sorcerers. Indeed, the powers of pucks were much greater than even those of behemoths and dragons.

Turo settled in fairly quickly, living in Doyle Mansion's root cellar for a time before moving into the house to live in a den built into the basement wall. He had decided to live in the mansion mainly because of the art in the house; in particular, he admired the lovely tapestries.

Aside from the nudge from the Holy Spirit, Frances might have picked Turo anyway, mainly because she had already fallen in love with Deena, who was prone to throwing even more things than Turo; though this never really bothered Frances, who was of the brainy sort, and more than capable of realizing that even the smallest of us can be very important and accomplish great things, despite having a few little quirks that might tend to annoy others.

Turo and Deena would eventually become friends, and more. In fact, in due course, they would marry. Because of a lack of goodness in the world, they would only be allowed to have one child, a boy named Pizzo who would always call Doyle Mansion home.

Pizzo ended up finding the doorway to Ancora, which he visited a few times. Returning from one of his trips there, as he was looking down into the dumbwaiter shaft from the third floor, he happened to

notice an odd crack of light on the first floor coming from the wall opposite the doorway he was familiar with in the butler's pantry. Being too busy with other things on that day to investigate, he ended up forgetting about what he had seen. But perhaps someday he'll remember, and look into what other possible secrets the dumbwaiter might hold.

“For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” Jeremiah 29:11, Isaiah 41:10

How Tall the Yew Grew

Roughly forty years before the Supercities came into full existence, a topiary made from a yew tree and shaped into a cross was vandalized on the Galloway Estate, situated directly across the street from Doyle Mansion, the neighborhood being located in a suburb of Montgomery, Alabama.

The vandal was a high school boy named Frank Wharton. While Frank would eventually change his ways and become a godly person, at this time, he was angry over a court ruling allowing Mr. Galloway to continue to display the yew tree cross. And so, egged on by his mother, who was a tremendous atheist, in the middle of the night, he attacked.

Blessedly, two other topes (as magical topiaries are often called) stopped Frank from completely destroying the yew tree with the chainsaw he was using for the task.

Having been brought to life previously by a neighborhood puck troll, Memory Magic had allowed the anteater and gorilla to awaken, the anteater tackling Frank so that the gorilla could sit on him until Mr. Galloway came out of the house. By this time, the police were already on their way.

About two-thirds of the yew tree had been cut off. At this time in the world, gnomes were super-scarce because most of them were living in another realm called Erdém that also held most of the genies in existence.

With the gnomes being more reluctant than the genies with regard to leaving the protection of Erdém, upon hearing of the vandalism through the grapevine (as the saying goes), the genies decided to send help in the form of their top horticulturist, a girl

genie named Glamini, who actually specialized in trees and was practically in love with yew trees.

Made from a very mature tree, the yew cross had been well over twenty feet tall. Now, it was roughly seven. At the time of Glamini's first visit, the cross had gotten over its initial shock of being cut and was already growing again. However, because yew trees generally only grow about a foot a year, without help, this one would likely take decades to completely recover.

So let's see if we can do something about that, Glamini thought while gently stroking the branches.

Because yews, like many trees, have a mind and will of their own, this was going to be a challenge, particularly because the yew had very much liked the cross shape it had been in, and so had decided to start splitting into two at the top, in an attempt to try to get back to being a cross as quickly as possible.

Using tiny magical pruners from her tree-tending satchel, while speaking to the yew in a soft, green-oriented, and somewhat musical language, Glamini managed to convince the tree to grow both taller and wider, in actually more the shape of a true cross.

In recognizing that genies are wise—as well as benevolent, especially to trees—the yew heeded her coaching.

Mr. Galloway had recently started making another cross out of a yew about ten feet in height that was nearer the house than the original cross topiary that was closer to the street. Glamini wouldn't at all be tending to the newer one, but did want to try to help the vandalized one get healthy again, as well as get back to a proper cross shape, since this was what the tree also obviously wanted.

Visiting roughly every six months to trim and talk softly, greenly, and musically to the tree, Glamini noted that the cross was shaping up nicely. In truth, the genies had taken a special interest in the yew on the Galloway Estate because the lovely cross was much-needed, particularly due to the direction the world was taking at this time, mainly towards evil instead of good. The horticulturist on each of her trips had been taking certain measurements of the tree because

the numbers were related to the language she was using to speak to the yew, in particular, because of how numbers are connected to music.

About three years into the tending, the yew had grown to fifteen feet high and was very much recognizable as being the shape of a cross, this being a lovely complement to the many bountiful topiaries on the property that were mostly in the shapes of animals, insects, and birds, though a few spirals, balls, and cones had been worked into the landscape. In addition to the two crosses, the owl and the butterfly were probably Glamini's favorites, though she did think the giraffe the most regal and the porpoise the most playful.

As far as Mr. Galloway's progress on newer topiaries, Glamini on her most recent trip noticed that a rhino had been added since her last visit. She particularly noticed him because he was wandering a bit. Instead of staying in the spot where he was supposed to be by the two-story gazebo, he was heading back to explore a weedy patch of vines and bushes behind Mr. Galloway's fallout shelter at the very rear of the property.

The rhino had been brought to life about two months previous by a girl puck troll living in the Galloways' home named Heike who had awakened the topiary specifically to help deal with two hobgoblins that had taken up residence in the garden shed on the estate.

Due to Memory Magic, the rhino had roused himself a couple of other times since, once to help clean up branches after a storm and another time from being disturbed by construction noises down the street. While Heike had noticed that the rhino was somewhat active, as many of the topes were, she hadn't thought to put an extra hold on the creature when magically settling him.

Well, it was a very good thing that Glamini was visiting on this day because the rhino was about to stray even farther than just the area behind the fallout shelter. In fact, by the time the genie noticed he was gone, the creature was halfway down the back alley that was mainly for utility purposes, like for garbage trucks to pick up trash

and for people to access their garages where they kept their cars, motorcycles, riding lawn mowers, and such.

Zooming down the alley after the rhino, Glamini managed to lure him back to the estate with a peppermint pansy petal she had in her pocket.

Next, using one of her magical skills (the one that gave genies the nickname of Great Multipliers), she multiplied the pansy petal to about fifty thousand in a great pile by the gazebo for the rhino to munch on. And he seemed to be enjoying the treat as Glamini went back to tending to the yew.

In case we might be wondering, there were no pucks around right now to get the rhino magically settled because Heike and her friend, Pizzo, from across the street, were both away for a couple of weeks visiting friends in another state.

Glancing over at the rhino a few times as she worked, Glamini thought him content enough to stay by the gazebo. With peppermint being very calming to the senses, hopefully, he would stay put.

However, just as she was finishing her trimming and talking to the yew, Glamini again noticed the rhino leaving the estate by the alleyway. This time, as she followed after the tope, she had some difficulty locating him.

Although he was made from a rather large viburnum, he had evidently figured out how to hide by curling into a ball to look like a regular bush, and by blending in with other shrubberies and small trees of similar coloring and leaf shape. Thus, as Glamini searched, back and forth along the alley, she wasn't able to find him.

At first, she didn't even realize he was purposely hiding from her; but eventually, she had to consider that this was a sneaky creature.

Rhinos normally have tiny brains, but does this one perhaps have a brain that's a little bigger? Glamini wondered.

While he was being wily, she could catch little whiffs of peppermint from the rhino's breath.

Following the whiffs, she ended up on a nearby farm, one actually owned by Mr. Galloway and where Frank Wharton was working while finishing college. By this time, he had already made a complete turnaround in his life.

Frank was not at the farm on this day. However, Glamini did meet up with a ballybog living in a little mud hut on the edge of a large pond.

In case we might be wondering, ballybogs are shapeshifting creatures that like to live in bogs and occasionally around the edges of ponds and lakes. Though varying greatly in size, most are around the size of gnomes, who generally range from ten to fifteen inches in height. While all ballybogs are mischievous, not all are evil in a decided fashion. Some are good and some are bad, and Glamini knew this. However, even the good ones of these muddy-looking creatures are most often sour and surly.

This one, named Gyom, was fairly good; but he was definitely also sour, especially on this day because he didn't like the presence of the rhino, who was currently munching on fallen pecans in a small grove, but who had tromped through the mud on the edge of the pond to get to the grove.

Since Gyom didn't want the rhino on the farm, especially not anywhere near his cozy little mud hut, he decided to help Glamini, who had already decided on a course of action.

First, she levitated all of the fallen pecans in the grove, making them out of reach for the rhino. Then, Gyom helped her lay a trail of them leading back to the Galloway Estate.

Although they chose a fairly secluded route, they had to hide a few times from passersby, the rhino knowing instinctively to do this as well, hiding as he had before by curling into a ball on a couple of occasions, once by scurrying behind a garden wall, and another time by melding with a thicket.

Upon reaching the fallout shelter, Gyom headed back to the farm, waving off Glamini's thanks with, "Yah...whatever...just try to keep him here."

Although the rhino wasn't directly her responsibility, Glamini did intend to try to do just that, first by creating another great pile of peppermint pansy petals, this one a hundred thousand in number, and then by applying her brain to the problem.

At one point when the rhino was taking a small break from the munching of petals to have a burp and a small stretch of his legs, Glamini noticed that he meandered up to the yew cross she had been tending, only to gaze up at it for a couple of minutes in an almost mesmerized fashion. Then he walked a few feet to one side of the cross, but he wouldn't pass it. Neither would he pass the position of the yew on the other side. Instead, he eventually turned to head back to the pile of petals.

Trying a little experiment, Glamini made the petal pile float up to the cross and land just past it, right next to the sidewalk running along the front of the estate. While the rhino had followed the pile, he didn't pass the cross, but instead turned back to snuffle in a patch of clover.

So I was right, Glamini thought, he won't go past the cross.

After moving the pile of petals back to beside the gazebo, the horticulturist got to work on a plan that had swiftly formed in her brain.

Genies have a way of communicating with their future selves by means of a Magical Grapevine running through time, the communication channel being called "grapevine" even though it was actually more related to several magical wisteria vines located in various places around the world. Though indeed magical, these were of the standard wisteria types that were not evergreen; thus, they worked better in spring, summer, and fall than they did in winter when the plants were mostly dormant. Blessedly, this was early fall, and so Glamini had no trouble contacting her future self. But come to think of it, "grapevine" was apt for a name because the little device she was using for the messaging was about the size and shape of a small grape.

By the time Glamini finished making certain arrangements, which would take place at night, the rhino had long since finished eating the pile of petals. Sneaking toward the rear of the estate again, he actually looked as though he might be planning to head back to the farm at any moment. Since she didn't want to have to keep chasing him and luring him back, Glamini employed two other topes, a horse and a large praying mantis, to keep the rhino entertained the rest of the day by playing games with him like "Hide and Seek" and "Jump over the Koi Pond."

With about four hours until nightfall, Glamini decided to take a nap in a flower pot while waiting.

She awoke just as the sun was setting to welcome a special visitor to the estate, a time traveler who had just arrived through a destination window located near the gazebo.

Frees Muldoon, a teenager, was what was known as a TKT, short for Time Key Traveler; and he was a special friend to Glamini in the future, the younger version having heard of him from occasionally talking to her older self via the Magical Grapevine.

Frees hadn't even been born yet in this time, which was why he needed to come back in time to help by using his gift—that of being able to make plants grow, very quickly. For this was exactly what Glamini had in mind, for Frees to spurt the yew tree so that it would grow large enough to keep the rhino topiary contained to the Galloway Estate.

The task would end up taking Frees less than five minutes to accomplish. He was doing this at night so that people in the neighborhood wouldn't see the rapid growth in progress, which was quite amazing to witness, even for Glamini, who was used to magical things, but could barely have imagined how wonderful it would be to see the cross grow so incredibly fast to such an amazing height, a hundred and five feet to be exact, where it leaned protectively over the house and gardens.

The arms of the cross ended up being like a super-thick hedge completely encircling the outer edges of the entire estate; though this was a hedge with no grounding except for at the trunk of the yew.

While in the garden, Frees took the opportunity to spurt several rose bushes, not to any gigantic sizes like the yew, but just to the point of being larger in a healthy sort of way, as well as covered with twice as many blooms as before the spurt. A small vegetable garden on the estate, as well as several beds of tulips, also felt the benefit of his visit. Lastly, he spurted masses of honeysuckle vines covering a pergola behind the house.

Frees left shortly thereafter, bidding Glamini farewell using a particular triangle hand symbol that was catching on in the future as a means of wishing someone well, in addition to being a standard hello-and-goodbye gesture.

As far as containing the rhino, while he could have snuck underneath the encircling yew arms, somehow he knew not to. In truth, he was completely content being inside the arms of the cross. With regard to his wanderings, although his brain was somewhat small, it had earlier led him to look for something. He hadn't quite known what he was looking for, but definitely something, which was why he had strayed from the estate.

Glamini had suspected that the rhino had been searching for something, like adventure, or possibly something even more important, like meaning; and she was happy to see him now so content. And it occurred to her as she was getting ready to leave the estate that the answer to the rhino's search was very like that of human beings. Often, the answer to what they seek is already available to them right where they are, in the form of the cross. In truth, nothing in the world can fill the soul—not entertainment, not wealth, not human friendships, not worldly success, not doing good works—because the soul is larger than the whole world. Only God is large enough to fill the human soul.

In the morning, the people of the neighborhood were pretty amazed to discover what had had happened to the yew overnight.

They got used to the enormous magical cross fairly quickly, with many being smart enough to know exactly what the topiary symbolized: The saving and protection of Jesus Christ, because He truly is the only thing that can save and protect any of us. However, we have to be willing to walk into His open arms.

It seemed the rhino's brain was fairly large (for a rhino) after all, because he was smart enough to know that he had everything he could ever need right where he was, which meant he should stay put. And it's a good thing he was on the Galloway Estate over the years because he ended up protecting the property and its residents from literally hundreds of demons, gremlins, various types of hobgoblins, nyregs, and even flash dragons. Being incredibly attuned to his surroundings, he could sense the invisible creatures like stealth hobs and gremlins much more quickly than other topes in the garden could. In his spare time, the rhino liked to gaze at the beautiful yew cross, and at the many birds, squirrels, lizards, spiders, and such that liked to call the tree home.

While some of the branches of the yew ended up growing in squiggles and spirals over the years, the tree did retain its overall shape of a cross without any tending to by genies, gardeners, or otherwise.

So this was "How Tall (and wide) the Yew Grew" like a small version of the real cross that spreads over the whole world. Except that the cross is still growing, so who knows how large it might be in the End.

Glamini liked to write short stories in her spare time. Upon returning home, inspired by the enormous yew, she ended up writing a tale about another yew tree, one that grew taller than any other yew ever grew, even to the point of reaching the clouds. Although it was windier up high, and the tree endured many other hardships such as lightning strikes and pounding hail, the yew stuck with its tall position in the sky the whole of its long life. Able to drink from the clouds, as well as the earth, the yew always preferred the clouds,

being of the opinion that we should prefer the things above more than the things found on earth.

The story was printed in the Genie Gazette, along with an account of what Glamini had accomplished on the Galloway Estate with regard to the yew cross and the escaping rhino. Her fellow genies enjoyed reading both tales. Of course, the cloud story was just a fairy tale, while the one about the topiary rhino was completely true.

““For there is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease.”” Job 14:7

Buttons, Feathers, Bottles, Etc.

In a wilderness area just east of Supercity Twelve in the U.S., four children ended up lost in the woods all on the same day.

Two were a brother and sister pair, nine and eight years old respectively, named Baldwin and Blanche who were from a mothership community. They had been traveling with their parents to visit relatives on a ranch when three megahobs attacked the family. While no one was killed (except the megahobs by the father and mother using flute weapons), in the frenzy, the kids ended up separated from their parents, unable afterwards to find them in the dense patch of forest into which they had run when the attack first happened. Then, being slightly disoriented, and with Baldwin having dropped his compass on the run from the megahobs, the pair ended up heading in the wrong direction to find their parents, soon becoming lost by several miles from them and well out of earshot of being able to shout for help, which wouldn't have been a good idea anyway in case more megahobs or other types of unfriendlies were in the area.

The other two children, Hugo and Lynette, were also brother and sister, twins eight years old. They were from Supe-12 but had wandered off from a logging work camp they were visiting for the day where their father was foreman. Not being used to traveling in the woods, they basically couldn't tell one tree from another, and therefore got themselves terribly turned around when trying to make their way back to the work camp after an hour or so of exploring after lunchtime. Thus, they ended up going several miles in the wrong direction.

However, the details of how everybody got lost are pretty unimportant. What is important is that Hugo and Lynette soon met

up with Baldwin and Blanche. And it's a very good thing that they did because most city children can't manage themselves in the woods as well as ones brought up surrounded by wilderness.

Hugo and Lynette could tell by the way their counterparts were dressed that they were outsiders, which was what many elites of the Supercities called people from the self-sustaining communities. (Backwards, inferior, commoners, and low-class were a few of the other names.)

Being children of the "special people" in the cities, the twins thought themselves much superior to the commoners they had just met. However, they were about to find out just how valuable the help of a couple of outsiders could be.

Already, Lynette's feet were terribly hurting from the fancy shoes she had chosen to match her culottes, neither the shoes nor the culottes being very suitable for exploring in the woods. In fact, she already had mosquito and chigger bites on her legs. Her brother at least was wearing more comfortable shoes, though he too was wearing shorts and also had bites, as well as scratches on his ankles from patches of thorny vines.

Blanche was carrying a pod belt pack, made by a gifted technologist to hold much more than its outward appearance might suggest. Inside, she had an extra pair of shoes that she had slightly outgrown and was taking to one of her cousins on the ranch.

"I can store your shoes in my pack, so you won't have to carry them," she told Lynette.

"Thank you," Lynette replied, slipping on the comfortable walking shoes that instantly made her feet feel much better.

The shoes had been made by a cobbler in the mothership community using local materials like canvas from the village weaver, leather from a cattle farmer, and rubber recycled from old truck tires.

Though his was a shoulder version, Baldwin also had a pod pack, from which he produced a small pouch containing leaves

which he crushed and helped Hugo and Lynette rub on their legs and arms.

“Citronella leaves help keep the bugs off,” Baldwin explained. “We grow them in our community, but you can find them in the wild sometimes too. They’re part of the geranium family.”

Not only did the leaves smell nice, the plant oil was already keeping the bugs at bay.

While Hugo’s ankle scratches were not deep enough to be at risk for getting infected, they were rather itchy. This was resolved when Baldwin poured cool water from a canteen onto a handkerchief, which he used to clean the scratches, this helping to relieve the itching.

While some lost people might do well to simply stay put and let someone find them, in this case, Baldwin and Blanche felt it safer to move on, doing so with their companions after only a small break to share water around, since Hugo and Lynette didn’t have any with them and were by this time very thirsty. Blessedly, the season was early fall and not too warm, which meant the water Blanche and Baldwin were carrying would stretch.

In traversing the woods, Baldwin kept an eye on the position of the sun, basically keeping it at their backs as he led the group so that that they wouldn’t walk in circles. If they kept to a straight path, he felt sure they would eventually come across a settlement or a farm, or maybe even the camp where the twins’ father worked. With this part of the country being fairly well populated, they weren’t totally in the boonies.

“It’s not like we’re in the middle of Alaska or Siberia,” Baldwin told the others.

After a couple of hours of a steady hike, though they hadn’t found anything or anybody, they were still in good spirits.

However, after about three more hours of nothing but the same, they definitely started feeling a little less happy, particularly because the forest was beginning to look very dusky. Soon, they would have to find a good place to camp for the night, not just because of the

coming darkness, but also because they were all extremely tired by this time.

As Baldwin was looking around for a suitable campsite—not too low or too high, and a spot sheltered somewhat from the stiff breezes that had sprung up in the late afternoon and had yet to wane—Blanche made a wonderful discovery. Sitting on a large flat rock lying in the protective shadow of a tall sugar maple tree, fourteen smooth pebbles had been placed into the shape of a triangle.

Blanche could barely contain her excitement as she pointed this out to her companions. Carefully gathering the pebbles in her hands, she said, “Genies sometimes leave things to help travelers.”

“But they’re just little stones,” Hugo remarked, somewhat irritably.

Lynette, from being so tired, was also cranky as she said, “So what’s the big deal?”

“They’re Glow Pebbles,” Blanche answered. “They give off light at night when rubbed between the palms, and they give off warmth.”

“They give off a lot of warmth,” Baldwin chimed in, “which we’re going to need because we don’t have blankets in our packs.” With the sun going down, it was already starting to feel very cool. “I have some matches, so we can make a fire,” he added, “but the pebbles will keep us warm even better than a fire.” He was right. In fact, simply slipping a pebble each into their pockets somehow warmed them all over to just the right temperature to be comfortable.

Using the light from the Glow Pebbles to see in the creeping darkness, they searched for sizeable stones to make a circle to ring the fire, after which, Lynette and Blanche collected dry leaves and other kindling to get the fallen branches and chunks of dead wood that Hugo and Baldwin were gathering started.

The matches Baldwin had in his pack had been dipped in wax for waterproofing, and were further kept dry from being stored in an empty shotgun shell that was taped on the open end.

Blanche and Baldwin had a good amount of food in their packs to share with their new friends including bread, cheese, apples, and dried meat.

Baldwin and Blanche said grace before eating, which somewhat confused Lynette and Hugo, who had never heard of this tradition before. Nor had either ever thought of thanking God for providing for them, since at this time in their lives they hadn't been taught anything about God or Jesus.

Feeling full from the meat, bread, and cheese, they decided to save the apples for breakfast.

Lynette and Blanche had gathered extra sticks about knee-high in length. Standing these upright and leaning them against one another, the girls made four piles into teepee shapes, each topped with a Glow Pebble, the light from the fire and the four pebbles making all of them feel less afraid about being lost in the woods at night.

They talked after dinner, in particular, about the many things genies liked to make. Hugo and Lynette knew almost nothing about genies, and so were naturally very interested in what their new friends were telling them.

"They can make some things from scratch," Blanche said, "but they mostly like to make things out of other things, starting with something simple."

"They pretty much only use simple things like buttons, shells, bobby pins, and pebbles," Baldwin stated. "In fact, I don't think their magic will even work on stuff like porcelain vases, ornate boxes, and fancy candlesticks."

This was partly true, as the genies rarely made anything super-embellished or complex into magical objects; but this was mainly out of preference, rather than skill, because genies worldwide preferred simple and useful things to those only decorative and non-useful in function.

Blanche ended up showing Lynette the little doll she often carried in a pocket that was only four inches tall. “Her name is Mitzi,” Blanche said.

While Mitzi was cute, Lynette couldn’t resist bragging about two large dolls she had at home. Evidently, Susanna and Michelle, each around two feet tall, were part of the *Super City Gals* line of dolls that Blanche had never heard of.

“They each come with four outfits and a kit that includes things like a hair brush, jewelry, perfume bottles, and a purse,” Lynette gushed. “My friend Marsha has a Ginny doll, and I’m getting a Jolene for my birthday in November.” Marsha evidently had two *Super City Pals* too, a dog and a pot-bellied pig on little leashes that were meant to act as companions to the *Super City Gals*. “So I might get a Persian cat for Christmas,” she added.

To Lynette’s description of the dolls, Blanche might have been tempted to feel a little envious, except for suddenly thinking that the larger dolls would be hard to carry around on trips, not to mention the risk of messing up their fancy clothes and shoes. So she very quickly decided that she was perfectly content with just having Mitzi.

They went to sleep a short while later, using clothing from Baldwin’s pack for pillows.

Hugo found it quite surprising how comfortable it could be to lay one’s weary head on a folded-up pair of jeans; and Lynette, likewise, the two t-shirts rolled together that were serving as her pillow.

The next morning, after their apple breakfast and dousing the fire embers really good with loose dirt, the group continued on in the same direction they had been heading the previous day.

Along the way, they found an abundance of berries and nuts to eat. They also replenished the water in the canteens, being careful to use clean water from a moving stream, rather than stagnant water from a somewhat scummy pond.

“How do you know what’s poisonous and what’s not out in the woods?” Lynette wanted to know, as she had heard tales of poisonous mushrooms.

“We just learn growing up what’s safe and what’s not,” Baldwin answered.

“City people can probably find books on the subject,” Blanche input.

Again, the day yielded nothing as far as settlements or people, though they did come across an abandoned farmhouse in whose root cellar they found several cans of corn, beets, and baked beans, which they took with them. Blanche also took an empty bottle from a shelf to stuff into her pack.

They might have been tempted to feel disheartened about still being lost except for the fact that they still had the Glow Pebbles, water, and they now had more food. Plus, they were about to make another exciting discovery—that of six twigs placed three each into two triangle shapes sitting on top of a fallen log.

“Fire Twigs,” Baldwin said excitedly. “You just break them to light dry leaves and kindling to make a fire. We can use these and save the matches.”

In truth, genies tend to watch out for lost children. However, they often don’t just lead them directly out of their predicament, but instead help in other ways, like by leaving useful things like the Glow Pebbles and Fire Twigs lying around.

With regard to these simple magical things, children are often the best ones to find genie-made objects because their brains don’t as readily dismiss them as unimportant like the brains of many grown-ups do.

Being somewhat near a small river when they stopped for the night, Baldwin led them away from its banks and to fairly high ground, explaining, “In case of a flash flood at night, we don’t want to be too near a river.”

When opening the cans of beans, beets, and corn, Baldwin used a utility knife he always carried that was a Leatherman, a famous brand of history.

Hugo was very interested in the knife that not only had blades and a can opener, but also screwdrivers, pliers, a wire cutter, file, saw, scissors, and an eight-inch scale.

“That’s amazing!” he said. Evidently, Baldwin’s dad had a similar knife, though of the Swiss Army brand, also famous in history.

Going through Blanche’s pack after dinner, Lynette wanted to know what some of the stuff was for.

A piece of broken mirror could be used in conjunction with the sun to signal for help. “But that’s only if someone is overhead to see the signal, like a gryphon or a wind horse,” Blanche stated.

(At this time, no planes or helicopters were in operation because of the issue of gremlins who had for many years been causing crashes, the deadly percentages of which had finally gotten to the point that most people didn’t want to risk their lives.)

Lynette also wanted to know what the bottle was for that Blanche had procured from the farmhouse.

“You can use it as a candle holder, or to hold water, vinegar, salt,” Blanche replied. “My mom uses the side of a bottle as a rolling pin.”

“And to hold up the Bundt cake pan while it cools after baking,” Baldwin input.

During the day, Lynette had found herself admiring Blanche’s braided leather bracelet adorned with small pottery beads.

In noticing her friend’s interest, Blanche gave it to her. “So you’ll have something to remember me by when you get home,” she said.

“Thank you,” Lynette gushed, feeling as if she had been given something incredibly special and that she would treasure even more than a Jolene doll or a Persian cat pal.

Suddenly feeling like she wanted to return the kind gesture, Lynette took off the opal necklace she was wearing and handed it to Blanche, saying, “So you’ll have something to remember me by.”

“This is very valuable!” Blanche said in surprise. “Are you sure you want to give this away?”

“Yes, I’m sure,” Lynette answered. “I want you to have it. Plus, you never know how long something might be valuable. I mean, look at what happened with diamonds.”

Indeed, this was true, as the majority of diamonds had completely lost their value in recent years over the fact that most people were unable to tell cursed ones from blessed ones, both being produced by the tears of Diamond Girls, with regular diamonds simply getting lost in the mix these days.

And speaking of cursed objects, in contrast to the genies making magical things out of simple items, the sorcerers were mainly only able to curse fancy and non-useful things. While the exact reason for this was a mystery, suffice it to say that it was easy for them to put a curse on an alabaster vase or a pewter figurine, though trying to hex a button or an old cigar box tended to completely confound most of these evil men.

The next day as the four traversed the woods, they discussed uses for various simple things.

Lynette was amazed when Baldwin expressed how many things a handkerchief could be used for.

“Wear as a neck scarf, tie two together to make a belt, use one to wipe off a wet seat, carry your lunch in one, hold a pant leg up for riding a bicycle, use to blow your nose, top honey and jam jars to keep out bugs....”

Likewise, Hugo thought Blanche’s list of what to do with old newspapers and used sheets of wrapping paper equally interesting.

“You can use them to make sun hats, paper baskets, as book jackets, to write letters on, make a fan, origami birds and animals, for compost, theatre masks....”

“So if we can’t find magical things, we can just use ordinary stuff for fun and to help us,” Lynette remarked.

In thinking that she had access to many of these types of items in the city—like balls of twine, clothespins, bottles, candy boxes, socks, cheese tubs—Lynette ended up deciding that they might be just as valuable to have around as the genie-made items they had found.

However, with regard to magical things, Baldwin and Blanche ended up astounding Hugo and Lynette by telling them about a few super-powerful genie-made objects.

“There’s a shell that can transport a person instantly to the seaside,” Baldwin said.

“And a spool of thread that can turn someone invisible,” Blanche related, “you know, like how stitching in clothing is often invisible, or at least goes unnoticed.”

“Wow,” Lynette replied, wide-eyed.

Hugo was a bit more skeptical. “You’ve seen these things for yourself?” he asked.

“No, but we’ve heard about them from reliable sources,” Baldwin answered.

“Some of them are from stories,” Blanche had to admit, “but I believe them. It’s easy to believe because there is magic everywhere. We can see it in nature, and even in people, if we look for it.”

“I heard a story once about a magic candle that burned for a thousand years,” Hugo said.

“Maybe it was made by a genie,” Baldwin suggested.

When the topic turned back to ordinary things, they talked about how feathers are useful for stuffing pillows, bedspreads, and even coats.

“And they used to make writing quills, hats, and headdresses out of them,” Blanche added.

“Flat stones can be used for trivets, paperweights, and stepping stones,” Hugo remarked.

“And you can use egg cartons to organize beads, shells, and other craft items,” Lynette suddenly thought.

“Or to start tiny plants in,” Blanche input.

“Many houses in earthship communities are made out of old tires and bottles,” Baldwin said.

Taking a break at noon to have nuts and berries for lunch, Hugo found himself looking at his watch, which was rather a nice one, expensive at least.

Though it's not much good for anything, he ended up deciding, in having noticed that Baldwin, who didn't own a watch, could pretty much tell time by looking at the sky at various times throughout the day. And in comparison to his watch, Hugo found most of Baldwin's guesstimates to be accurate to within about ten minutes of the actual time.

That's not to say that a watch isn't useful, but it wasn't nearly as useful as Baldwin's utility knife, an item Hugo had decided he would much rather have than a watch.

Nearing the end of the day, Blanche made a remarkable discovery in a tree nook that her attention was drawn to by a redbird on a nearby branch giving off his characteristic *chink, chink, chink* noises. While this might have been divine intervention, in truth, kids living in the self-sustaining communities were trained to look for hidden caches containing contents intended to help travelers. These were filled and replenished by certain people such as members of the Underground Army, as well as a few magical creatures like bigfoots and gnomes. This particular cache contained a large pouch of dried fish, another of apricots, a map of the region marking the location of the tree with the nook, and a compass.

In studying the map, Baldwin and Hugo figured out that they were only about five miles from a poultry camp south of Supercity Twelve, and another six from there to a self-sustaining farm.

Since it was getting rather late, they decided to make camp and wait until morning to set out, their plan being to head to the poultry camp first where Lynette and Hugo would be able to hop the rail

from the camp into the city to get home. After dropping off their friends, Baldwin and Blanche would then head on to the farm, from which they would be able to contact their parents, afterwards, likely borrowing horses to make the journey some forty-five miles eastward back to their home in the mothership community, which was slightly closer than the ranch they had been heading toward when they got lost.

Evidently, people on ranches, farms, and whatnot could communicate with folks in other communities by means of special birds called dawn pigeons, and by magical message kites, neither of which Lynette and Hugo had ever heard of before. But they certainly knew about them now, for this was how they all planned to send messages to one another in the future because, of course, the four friends all wanted to keep in touch.

On their last night in the woods together, after a hearty dinner of fish and apricots, they played charades for a bit before going to sleep under the stars.

Setting out the next morning at a good pace, the group reached the poultry camp well before midday, where they all hugged goodbye, even the boys who had initially just tried to shake hands, but then found they couldn't help but hug one another as well.

"Thank you for all of your help," Hugo told Baldwin.

"Yours too," Baldwin returned, as he truly had found Hugo extremely helpful with tasks like gathering wood and reading the map.

"Please, keep the comfy shoes," Blanche said to Lynette while handing the fancy ones to her after fishing them from her pack.

"Are you sure?" Lynette asked, having figured out by this time that even used shoes were fairly valuable to those living in the self-sustaining communities.

"Yes," Blanche answered. "My cousin doesn't really need them. We just always try to make use of everything as long as we can, like by wearing them out."

“Well, when I outgrow these,” Lynette offered, “if they’re not totally worn out, I’ll make sure someone else gets some use out of them.”

Not too long after returning home to the city, Lynette sent one of the *Super City Gals* to Blanche, by means of one of the larger dawn pigeons. This doll happened to be Paige, who ended up being a good friend to Mitzi over the years.

For the past couple of years, Lynette had kept a journal, a popular activity amongst many in both the Supercities and the outside communities. In it, she started making notes about the many practical uses of simple things like paperclips, jars, matchboxes, pencils, spoons, gum wrappers, coasters, potholders, buttons, clothes hangers, baskets....

The list was practically endless; and she eventually (about six years into the future) used many of her notes to write a book that became valuable to thousands of people in the cities, who hadn’t at all known exactly how valuable many of these everyday items could be.

About two months after their woodsy adventure, Baldwin sent Hugo a utility knife very like his own that he purchased from the metal peddler that passed through the mothership community each year a few weeks before Christmas.

Baldwin ended up using all of the credits he had saved up from working six weeks straight after school each day on a nearby farm, doing various chores. But he didn’t care because he wanted Hugo to have something useful, especially in case he ever got lost in the woods again.

Hugo very much appreciated and treasured the gift his whole life, not only because of how clever and useful it was, but because of the special friend who had given it to him.

Oddly enough, since becoming unlost, something had been on Hugo’s mind all these many weeks. Early on when he and Lynette were in the woods, before they met up with Blanche and Baldwin, he remembered something he had seen when passing a small crabapple

tree, this being three feathers put together in the shape of a triangle and stuck into the crook of a branch.

Funny how he hadn't thought of this when finding either the Glow Pebbles or the Fire Twigs, but the feathers had come to mind shortly after they came home. Now, he wondered if they were genie-enhanced feathers, and what they might be for.

If they were magical, he hoped that just the right person or persons would find them, perhaps other travelers who might be lost. His mind also speculated that they might be very powerful. Since they were feathers, maybe they could allow a person to fly. Having seen the magic of simplicity at work firsthand, he had lately found himself being much more of a dreamer, and much less a skeptic.

Hugo would continue to think about the three feathers for many years, believing that anything might be possible with regard to their powers. And, in truth, anything is possible when we become less skeptical because it's mainly our ways of thinking that set limits on us and hold us back.

“How precious is thy steadfast love, O God! The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings.” Psalm 36:7

The Puck Fashion Shop

The original Puck Fashion Shop was located in a private residence known as Doyle Mansion in Alabama. The owner of the mansion, a woman named Em who was a writer but whose main hobby was sewing, started the shop to satisfy the clothing needs of certain puck trolls living in her home.

The endeavor grew rapidly because Em was a talented and quick sewer, making many more garments than her own little puck family could possibly use. Therefore, the clothing—and accessories like hats, scarves, belts, barrettes, and purses—needed to be shared. Genies made the shoes for the shop, which began serving pucks from all over the world.

Eventually, the clientele became too much for Em alone to manage; and so, other than having a small outpost at the mansion, the entire shop moved to a double-decker attic in a large house on a self-sustaining farm in Missouri, the central location of this in the United States being a natural hub, just as the rail system in Kansas City had been a transportation hub throughout history. Not that many pucks used the rail system, other than on rare occasions; rather, they tended to travel by means of wind horses, gryphons, thunderbirds, etc.

In this larger version of the shop, puck seamstresses and tailors were collaborating with genies who not only used their talents to multiply clothing and accessories (also making them of various sizes), they were able to put magical spells on many items.

Some of the genie spells simply had to do with function, like making a carpenter's coveralls nail-proof (to include saws, drills, punches, grinders, etc.) to prevent accidents. So too was a chef's coat knife-proof and a woodcarver's apron chisel-proof. Children's

clothing could grow along with them; a headband could perform different tricks like becoming a jump rope; hats could turn into umbrellas; and so on.

In addition to being central and acting to serve the needs of puck trolls worldwide, when the Supercities and work camps came into being, the shop began serving another very important function—that of acting as a hub for some of the activities of the New Underground Railway (NUR for short) that was mainly started to help smuggle people out of the cities and camps to the safety of various outside communities. In fact, many pucks became NUR members for the express purpose of helping with the smuggling; for this was one of the main reasons God had put puck trolls on earth, so that these small but incredibly powerful beings could use their talents to help His children in times of danger.

For many years leading up to this point, pucks had been using their magic to bring artistic things to life such as topiaries and statues to help protect people from things like demons and hobgoblins, and from the growing malice of the sorcerers and their followers. So too had puck trolls hidden many human beings (and pets too occasionally) inside of paintings, tapestries, lithographs, and such. In the case of the NUR smuggling activities, the pucks were assisted by the genies in that certain articles of clothing made by the puck seamstresses and tailors were being enhanced by genie magic.

The enhancements mainly had to do with resizing in that the clothing started off small, but then was able to grow. After being donned by people, the articles of clothing would shrink again, also shrinking anything inside of them down to a very small size, to just about match that of most puck trolls who, in general, ranged as adults from five to six inches in height.

As a result of the shrinking down, many people wearing the genie-enhanced garments became almost indistinguishable from pucks, except for the number of fingers and toes, of course, since pucks have but four on each hand and four on each foot, whereas, most people have five on each of their hands and feet. Whether

dresses, jumpsuits, jeans, coveralls, or even kilts and lederhosen, just about any article of clothing would work for this purpose.

In order to travel in and out of the cities, the pucks organized a large group of volunteer owls who became known as the Owl Fleet, and who were only too happy to help with this endeavor, having long since been terrific friends and allies to pucks, as well as many humans.

The owls themselves had decided that they preferred to be called a fleet, rather than something like a brigade or a troop or a unit, though any of these terms would have fitted the situation, since this was, after all, a military operation. Indeed, the NUR was under the jurisdiction of, and drew many of its members from, the Underground Army, of which the owls of the Owl Fleet were now also members.

Having absolute stealth from being completely soundless in flight, the owls were much better than other birds (even magical ones such as rookhs and dawn pigeons) at infiltrating the cities and camps. Plus, variety never hurt with regard to sizes and skills, of which there were plenty since a great number of species had eagerly signed up for service including eagle owls, sooty owls, screech owls, white-faced owls, and barn owls, to name only a few.

The pucks involved all wore special military uniforms designed and made by Ms. Belinda, the head seamstress at the Puck Fashion Shop. She and her assistants also made many of the articles of clothing for the people being rescued. And these talented craftsmen didn't see any need to make the garments all the same, or be at all drab about the designs or materials used. In fact, any material would work; and the pucks delighted in using fancier fare like organza and brocade as much as they did plainer fabrics such as denim, lawn, and seersucker. Ms. Belinda was a master of international fashion and even went so far as to design lovely kimonos, colorful dashiki suits, and graceful serapes for use on the smuggling missions. For the younger crowd, she made rompers, shirtdresses, and bunny suits, along with basic jeans and pull-over shirts of great varieties.

In the same way that lots of owls wanted to be involved, lots of puck trolls were lining up for missions. And, of course, they wanted to help because this was, after all, wartime. With a war being waged against God's children, everyone needed to do his or her part.

Very early on a particular April morning in a mining work camp in Virginia, a group of forty-three people (a mix of men and women) in a crowded barracks were very surprised by the arrival of six little military puck trolls, each carrying large bundles of tiny clothing.

After spreading out the bundles and pressing small buttons on each garment to size them up, the pucks then carefully mimed what they wanted the humans to do, which was to don the clothing and then press the buttons again to size themselves down within the garments.

This might be a good time to take a brief moment to explain why pucks never speak. In truth, their voices are so loud and booming that they are too much for the ears of other earthly creatures to handle. With it having been centuries since any puck troll had spoken, not even the pucks themselves knew if their voices were completely earth-shattering, or if it was simply an extreme shock for folks to hear such a large sound coming out of such a small creature.

Whatever the case, pucks had long ago decided never to risk using their voices, since they didn't want to either deafen or severely shock anyone. But they actually didn't need to speak, since they were fabulous at mime and because most pucks could read and write in order to communicate with others by means of notes and letters. Plus, throwing things was a pretty effective means of getting someone's attention, and pucks were born with this skill.

Now, back to the scene in the work camp where the clothes had been donned and buttons pressed, and where the pucks were gesturing the now-small people who were streaming out of the rear of the barracks over to the group of owls who had been waiting patiently for them in the tree fringe surrounding the camp.

Some people were skeptical about boarding the smaller owls. Though usually not larger than six inches, pygmy owls had

definitely wanted to be involved in these operations; and being amazingly strong for their sizes, each could easily carry two riders. Of course, there was no problem for groups of six to eight to clamber aboard the tawny owls, spotted owls, and barn owls making up the rest of this mini-fleet.

At the same time the work-camp rescue was going on, other teams of pucks and owls were liberating groups of people from a bunkhouse on a fish farm in Georgia, a shantytown in Supercity Four, a quarry work camp in Texas, a logging operation in South Carolina, and a crowded low-rise apartment building in Supercity Nine.

All of those being rescued were brought first to the farmhouse in Missouri that had excellent places to hide folks from the raids that occasionally took place on the farm by the ESS (the Enforcement Services Squad) and even some sorcerers who were out looking not only for city and work camp escapees, but those committing infractions of the many unfair laws that had been levied on people in the past few decades. This included many imprisoned women who were being made to comply with the Law of Four that was forcing them to have four children each, only to have many of the children taken away from them, mainly to be used as slaves in the work camps and factories, or in some cases as servants in elite homes in the Supercities.

Blessedly, those taking refuge at the farmhouse were well hidden in secret cellars, a magically camouflaged grain silo, and even a couple of old cisterns that had been turned into habitable safe spaces. Also, a few bigfoot caves nearby could be used for overflow. Thus, the sorcerers and their followers conducting these raids never found what they were looking for.

From the hub of the farm, arrangements were then made to take people to various communities, like self-sustaining ranches and mothership settlements, where they could make new lives for themselves. Wind horses, gryphons, thunderbirds, and rookhs generally helped with the transportation to these places, though some

folks occasionally set off on foot. Also, regular horses were plentiful at this time and loved to help people.

On a cool October morning, a large-scale mission was being launched to an organ donor facility in Supercity Six to rescue children of various ages. The term “donor” was used very loosely in this day and age, since the children, stolen from their mothers, were being held captive before being slaughtered so that their body parts could serve the needs of the elites in the Supercities.

The mission, involving fifteen pucks and twenty-four owls, was being headed by a brother-and-sister puck team, respectively named Hini and Cassi, who chose to arrive at Supercity Six at dusk, which was after the children’s dinner but before bed check at the donor facility, this being a time when the various guards, nannies, and medical personnel were having their own dinner and the wards were completely deserted, other than a couple of nurses whom the pucks put to sleep using a magical sleep spray the genies had developed for use on these types of missions.

As the puck trolls spread out inside the wards with their bundles of clothing, the older children helped get the babies and toddlers into bunny suits and rompers, afterwards pressing the shrinking buttons before themselves donning coveralls and jumpsuits to size themselves down as well.

The older children also helped the pucks carry the little ones out by various doors that had been unlocked by genie-made keys that would work in just about any lock.

The owls were waiting outside at various spots in the shadows for the escapees.

Being the largest of the fleet, several great horned owls had been fitted with rows of carriers very like car safety seats and into which the babies and toddlers were secured. After seeing to this, the older children and pucks hopped aboard other owls; and they were soon off, soaring into the skies and heading for the farm in the darkening night.

After roughly twenty minutes of flight, a toddler boy somehow managed to escape his carrier (this was because he was starting to learn to deal with buckles and straps). Once loose, he tumbled from the owl, giving everyone soaring nearby a good scare. However, they quickly realized there was nothing to worry about because the bunny suit the boy was wearing had a floating spell put on it for just such an occasion. How smart the genies were to anticipate these sorts of mishaps! Thus, the toddler floated until scooped up by the seat of his pants by the tawny owl Hini was riding.

Actually, even aside from the puck smuggling operations, quite a few genie-enhanced garments were in use throughout the Supercities, though these were not generally the sort that could change sizes. Instead, there were beanies that could make people invisible, socks that could help a wearer outrun a megahob, scarves that could lead blind people around, and jackets that could withstand acid spit by nyregs.

All in all, nearly two hundred children were saved during the daring mission to Supercity Six; and the sorcerers of that city were scratching their heads, while fairly tearing out their hair, as to how so many children could have disappeared all at once from a completely secure facility.

Over roughly a nine-year period, various puck-and-owl teams saved over seventeen thousand people from the cities and work camps in the United States.

Once, when the attic containing the Puck Fashion Shop was being raided, the searchers were given the explanation by the owner of the farm that several of the farmhands were using their spare time to make doll clothing and other toys for children.

“People have to have some hope in this world,” the man stated. Since several of the ESS had children, they were a little sympathetic, and therefore didn’t make too much of a mess. The pucks at the time were all hiding in a special place under the attic floor and were not discovered.

Blessedly, the Puck Fashion Shop was never found out over the years for what it really was by any of those on the side of evil, mainly because the forces of evil can never overcome things that are truly good. Plus, even if the sorcerers themselves had shown up in the farmhouse attic, they wouldn't have known what they were looking at because, for the most part, the brains of those steeped in evil are not nearly clever enough to look beyond surfaces and into the deep magic that is often hidden beneath.

“Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways; and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?” Job 26:14

From the Silver Diary

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The Jasper Diamond

Morgan Scull was a gifted artist living in a self-sustaining community known as the Netherwind Plantation, located in Alabama in the United States. Just finishing up his high school years, Morgan felt restless. He actually traveled a good deal in order to help distribute his paintings to various places around the globe, so it wasn't like he was having a stir-crazy feeling. Instead, he felt more as though he needed to find something; except he couldn't quite put his finger on what this something might be. Whatever it was, he did feel like he would need to get out in the world for a bit in order to find it. The timing was actually good for him to get out for a bit because he had recently found himself having artist's block, not just in lacking in motivation and inspiration, but also in being distracted.

Like many creative people, Morgan probably did need to take a break once in a while and head in a different direction, in order to find some direction, as well as clarity of thought because things in his brain were definitely muddled of late, not just as related to his art, but also as to what he was really supposed to be doing with his life. Like many of us at various milestones in our lives—such as high school graduation, finishing college, getting married, becoming parents, and so forth—we often need a little extra direction and clarity to help us with taking our next steps, particularly in the area of making wise decisions.

While Morgan enjoyed his work, and planned to continue painting even after high school, while studying Art History in college, lately it seemed to him that the painting simply wasn't enough, even though his work was very much of value to the world, due to his gift of producing paintings capable of turning conflict into peace, as applied to many situations.

Not only were his paintings being hung in areas of the world experiencing war, some were being used to quiet riots and stem terrorist activities in various hotspots. Even in the case of simple one-on-one fistfights, if one of Morgan's paintings came onto the scene, tempers were instantly cooled and the people stopped pummeling one another. So too was this applied to many shouting matches.

The genies had multiplied Morgan's work, to include pocket-sized foldable versions—carried by many individuals, including members of the Underground Army—that could be unfolded for deployment in various tumultuous situations.

When mulling over where he might go and what he might do to find this elusive unknown something he was looking for, Morgan chanced to hear of a legend involving a magical object known as the Jasper Diamond.

Now, according to the bible, the walls of New Jerusalem, the future heavenly home of God's children, will be made of jasper diamond, a stone not presently available to mankind on earth. But apparently, the genies had been able to make at least one (probably because genies are so adept at making magical objects). In truth, the genies could make jasper diamonds, each formed from a single grain of ordinary sand; however, none had been made for centuries because God had not sanctioned this.

The Jasper Diamond of legend was evidently a clear and brilliant stone that also held a faint rosy hue and was roughly the size of a smallish tomato pin cushion, one that could easily fit into the palm of one hand. Also according to the legend, the Jasper Diamond was an object of true fulfillment in that whoever finds it will find the clarity and answers he or she is looking for. So this was just the sort of quest Morgan felt he needed to be on at this transitory time in his life.

He could take a break from school because he was caught up and his classes were very flexible. Plus, his teachers were often willing to let him take trips, for various good reasons. And Luca and Pone,

the two puck trolls who liked to help him by mixing his paints, cleaning his brushes, etc., could handle things in the studio for a while. For that matter, since Morgan shared studio space with his mentor, a talented trompe l'oeil artist named Louetta Nolan, she could pretty much handle anything that might come up while he was gone, like if someone was interested in a particular one of his paintings, or if a copy of one needed to be sent to a place of conflict. (In case we might be wondering, copies of Morgan's paintings worked just as well as the originals with regard to calming heated situations and instilling peace.)

A kindly wind horse named Dara often liked to tote Morgan around when he needed to travel to distribute his work—or sometimes just on frivolous outings, like to get a breath of air—and she had no problem taking him on this quest.

In not knowing exactly where to start looking, Morgan decided to follow news that had reached his ears of a powerful magical object (as yet unknown as to specifics) residing in an earthship community in New Mexico.

The object turned out to be a mid-sized china teacup with a colorful flowered design that was magically able to refill itself with hot tea, and keep it hot, so that its owner, an elderly gentleman named Mr. Alexander, would always be able to have a lovely hot cup of tea.

“I found it on an early-morning walk about six months ago, just sitting out in the open on the ground,” Mr. Alexander told Morgan, who had accepted the offer of a cup of tea while Dara, who was waiting for him outside, soared around, taking in the view of the colorful desert landscape, while visiting with a few birds, cacti, rocks, rabbits, and such.

When Morgan confessed to Mr. Alexander that he was looking for an object called the Jasper Diamond, the man replied, “No, I don't know anything about a diamond.” However, he did tell his young guest about a magical shaker box he had recently heard of on Lion Mountain in Tennessee.

Bidding Mr. Alexander farewell a short while later, Jasper thought, *Well, if I don't yet have any specific news about the Jasper Diamond, I might as well look into other magical objects, like this shaker box.*

And so, he and Dara next headed to Tennessee, which really only took them a couple of minutes to reach because Dara was flying pretty fast.

Lion Mountain was an even larger self-sustaining community than either the Netherwind Plantation or the earthship community Morgan had just visited. In fact, it was already composed of many settlements spread out, and was still growing.

Despite the sprawl, by asking around, Morgan was able to locate the shaker box, whose trick was evidently that of multiplying objects put into it by triple.

“A genie-made object, obviously, since multiplying things is their forte,” Mrs. Hubblesworth, the owner of the box, stated. “It came to me by way of my aunt in Vermont, when she passed away last year.”

Although the box was very interesting, and pretty, being made of alder and white oak, Morgan couldn't help but feel he was on the wrong track.

When he confessed to Mrs. Hubblesworth what he was looking for, she told him, “Well, I don't know where you might look for this Jasper Diamond, but if I could offer you some advice....”

“Yes, please,” Jasper responded.

“It seems to me that you might be seeking wisdom, because clarity and direction come from having wisdom,” Mrs. Hubblesworth answered. “So I suggest that you consult one of the wisest persons I've ever met, the leader of our community, Astrid. She doesn't have a last name, and she wanders Lion Mountain, but I bet that wind horse you're with could find her pretty easily.”

This was completely true. And so, after saying goodbye to Mrs. Hubblesworth, Dara and Morgan went in search of Astrid, whom they found helping a big man name Bear Hammermill with building

a cabin in a lovely glade on a gentle hillside. Both were on top of the roof nailing on shingles.

Sitting down with Astrid (an elderly woman with white hair and lots of wrinkles) in order to explain things, Morgan received a somewhat unexpected answer.

“You’re looking for the bible, not a diamond,” she told him. “The bible holds the only true clarity and answers in this world; and it’s the most powerful magical object that ever existed, completely supernatural, full of wonder beyond description. And the magic works differently for each believer, being highly individual.”

While Morgan had to agree with her, he already had a bible at home, in fact, two; so he didn’t really need to go on a quest to find one. Therefore, while he did take what she said to heart, and to mull over, he still felt he needed to be out looking for a magical object, one he couldn’t find ready-to-hand at home.

Bear happened to have heard the conversation, and he told Morgan about a magical object he had once seen in a mothership community in Ohio, this being a hand-carved wooden chain, the size of a bracelet, that could lead a person home who might be lost in a desert, in the woods, in a snowstorm, etc.

Saying goodbye to Astrid and Bear, Morgan and Dara soon left, deciding to visit the Ohio community, since they were curious about this fabulous wooden chain.

The current possessor of the chain, a man named Mr. Surface, was happy to show it to Morgan, while telling him, “It works for any person. The chain somehow knows where home is for each individual. It was carved by a puck troll, and then a magician put a powerful spell on it.”

Morgan stayed to have dinner when the wife of Mr. Surface invited him.

While they were eating, Mrs. Surface told her guest about a couple of magical objects she was familiar with, ones not so nice by comparison to the three that Jasper had encountered on his adventurous day so far.

The first was a book that could evidently grow words like people grow hair, but the words were mostly nasty rumors and angry rhetoric meant to incite bad feelings and encourage lashing out amongst people.

“Probably created by a sorcerer,” Mrs. Surface reckoned.

The second was a child’s metal bank that evidently ate all of the coins placed into it.

These two items, Morgan didn’t feel inclined to try to track down. But they did get him thinking, specifically, about Satan’s influence on the world. And as he was helping to clean up after dinner, it suddenly popped into his head that maybe he was being influenced in some bad way with regard to his search for the Jasper Diamond.

What if the stone is just a rumor and doesn’t even exist?

Satan and his demons often sent people on goose chases designed to distract them from doing the things God really meant for them to be doing in life.

Following worthless pursuits...his mind further mulled.

However, something happened next that nearly made him fall over. After showing the wooden chain to Morgan, Mr. Surface had left it sitting on the kitchen counter. Putting up the stack of plates he had just dried, Morgan was standing right by the counter, while Mr. and Mrs. Surface across the room had their backs turned to him. The chain caught his eye when it suddenly shapeshifted, to become a pinkish-hued palm-sized diamond, before shifting again to once more look like the wooden chain bracelet.

Observing this back-and-forth transformation, while trying not to fall over with surprise, Morgan’s brain was suddenly flooded with certain clear thoughts, specifically with regard to the Jasper Diamond, which he was indeed looking at, though the stone was currently impersonating the wooden chain, the real one of which was sitting on a shelf in the Surfaces’ living room.

The Jasper Diamond is traveling around impersonating other magical objects, even taking on the tricks of these objects because it is a very powerful stone and can easily do this, his mind told him.

From this realization, Morgan suddenly remembered seeing a teacup on a shelf in Mr. Alexander's kitchen identical to the one that was magically refiling itself. Since many people had sets of cups, this didn't particularly register as odd in Morgan's brain, though he now felt it should have because the flowered teacup found in the desert probably should have been singular by appearance.

And did I see a like shaker box of alder and white oak sitting on Mrs. Hubblesworth's sewing table?

Morgan now thought he might have.

So none of the three things I found today were the Jasper Diamond, but they all were, he marveled.

Morgan didn't say anything to Mr. and Mrs. Surface about what had just been revealed to him, in somehow feeling it was important to keep the secret of the Jasper Diamond, not disclosing either its presence or its tricks to anyone.

Suddenly feeling a need to be home, after thanking his hosts for the lovely visit, Morgan rejoined Dara, who took a leisurely pace when heading south. Thus, the trip to Netherwind took about fifteen minutes, during which time Morgan's mind was definitely working.

Is the Jasper Diamond traveling to visit other magical objects because it's lonely? he wondered.

No, his mind answered him. *It's looking for something, just like I am.*

Morgan's answer as to what he was looking for came to him the very next morning over breakfast when he realized that Astrid was perfectly right. The magical object he had been looking for was right under his nose all the time, in the form of the bible, which he had been neglecting to read enough of lately, in being busy and distracted.

We tend to do a lot of running around after things, Morgan realized, when we often already have everything we need right at home under our very noses.

He definitely needed to be reading the bible, especially being at something of a turning point in his life, with his high school graduation coming up in less than three months. From there, he would be embarking on the next phase of his life's journey.

The only thing that's really solid and that doesn't change is the bible, he reminded himself. Things change all around us as time moves on, but the bible doesn't. So that's where we need to look for our answers.

“You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart....” Jeremiah 29:13

Eighteen Orclings and Their Deeds

Orclings are often abandoned by their parents very early, even as early as newborns. Except for the fact that the genies like to collect these orphans, many would die from attacks by megahobs, wolves, packs of gremlins, wildcats, etc. Little orcs also tend to eat poisonous plants from not knowing any better, and some end up accidentally burning themselves from getting too close to campfires. Simply put, they can't, when very young, look after themselves very well.

Upon taking the orclings into safekeeping, the genies make it their mission to tame them. Once tamed, orcs are no longer dangerous and are destined to perform good deeds for the rest of their lives, with many taking up residence on self-sustaining farms, ranches, and in mothership settlements; though they often live on the outskirts of these communities in order to maintain some distance from humans and have some privacy.

While not evil after they are tamed, most orcs remain disagreeable all their lives, tending to grumble and mumble a lot, even when enjoying their chores and other matters of everyday existence.

A genie named Breccan living in a magical realm called Ancora once tamed eighteen orclings at once; and the names of these orclings were as such: Haq, Haan, Hew, Hinn, Hai, Heef, Hil, Huf, Huut, Puu, Poh, Pofir, Pei, Pol, Pum, Pwee, Pah, and Penn.

While Breccan had named them, these were the types of names orcs tend to give their young anyway—fairly simple and easy to say. At least, the names were easy for the orclings to say when they first learned to speak in their garbled and grunting sort of way. The youngsters simply called Breccan, Papa. All of the eighteen were

boys. With many more boys than girls born to orcs for some reason, more boys ended up being abandoned.

Strangely enough, all of the orclings with “P” names were a little more outgoing and forward than the ones with “H” names who were quieter and more reserved.

Because Breccan didn’t want the forward ones picking on their weaker counterparts—and in knowing that it would be a while before they could learn to get along and treat one another like cherished brothers—he separated the orclings into two pens based on their personalities, the split also coinciding with the first letters of their names.

Taming the nasty spirit that orcs are born with involved music, which the orclings made themselves in their training classes using instruments much like those played by kids in grade-school years including tambourines, triangles, xylophones, finger castanets, small cymbals, maracas, rhythm sticks, etc.

In addition to their musical training, the orclings all participated in team-building ropes courses out in the woods in order to learn to help and trust one another. They also engaged in a form of square dancing to gain coordination skills. Nature hikes helped them learn about various plants and animals. Other types of field training, like navigating caves and digging tunnels, helped them learn good problem-solving skills. So too did Breccan make sure they could find their way back home to their pens from long distances out in the wilderness. But perhaps the most important aspect of their training had to do with learning some necessary rules of etiquette, because all of this was leading up to the orclings taking their places out in the human world in various communities.

Per Breccan’s assessment, the etiquette classes were going well; so well, in fact, that the orclings had just moved from the Darkling Village they started out in, to a series of tidy huts in the Brightling Village nearby, which was home to a variety of magical creatures, from which the orclings could learn much by doing some interacting.

By this time, there was no need to separate the eighteen by personality and first letters of names.

Holding one of their etiquette classes on picnic blankets in a lush green field, Breccan stated, “Wear your shoes; don’t throw them at people, or bears (the bear thing had recently happened). And cut your toenails nice and neat so that your feet will fit well into the shoes.”

To this, the orclings were nodding at one another, as they fully understood.

“Sharpen your teeth with a stick, but don’t snarl at people,” Breccan went on.

Good, good; sharpen teeth but don’t snarl, the eighteen thought collectively while again nodding at one another,

“What else?” Pah and Heef eagerly rasped simultaneously.

“When someone gives you a blanket, don’t chew it up. Wrap the blanket nicely around yourself to keep your shoulders and back warm. Greet people with a nod, instead of lunging at them.”

Nod, don’t lunge; good, good.

“If someone gives you a pie, eat it nicely without making too much of a mess. And don’t break the pie plate.”

To a series of garbled and grunting questions coming at him from the crowd, Breccan replied, “Yes, yes, it applies to any kind of pie, not just the fruit ones.”

Amazing! Any kind of pie!

The orclings were astounded because they wouldn’t have thought of this. So it was truly good that they were having these classes, because they never would have known these rules otherwise. (Sometimes it does take a little training for any of us to get the rules right.)

“Don’t shove a dozen cookies into your mouth all at once, or a dozen celery stalks,” advised Breccan. “Eat them one at a time.”

Surprisingly, the orclings didn’t need to be trained in how to perform the good deeds they were destined to do because things like

chopping wood, sweeping, painting, and tracking down lost sheep came quite naturally to them.

After the lesson in the lush field, the orclings practiced some of their newly-learned skills—wrapping blankets around their shoulders, being careful with pie plates, and eating celery stalks one at a time.

When they finished their practice, they each got a dozen cookies, which they remembered to eat one at a time. Feeling full after eight, Huf shared his last four cookies with Pum and Hil, giving them each two. Noticing, Breccan was amazed because their sharing lessons hadn't even taken place yet; these were scheduled for the next week, along with using silverware and napkins, and taking care of their shoes. Made by genie cobblers, the shoes should last several decades, growing with the orclings' feet as they grew into adults.

When fully grown, most orcs were nearly the size of a smallish man, but were much stronger, usually around three or four times as strong, which meant they were capable of some pretty amazing feats. The eighteen were presently around waist-high on an adult human, but were nearly as strong as they would be when full-grown. Their hands and feet were a little knobby and gnarled, and their skin held a heavy greenish tinge that would lighten as they aged, making them ashen in tone. Orcs never had much hair, but what they did have grew mostly in patches around their pointy ears; though some orcs had chin and chest hair as well, along with a bit more on their heads. Girl orcs tended to be almost indistinguishable from the boys. Both boys and girls had lots of teeth, which needed to be sharpened on occasion in order to eat tough foods like kohlrabi and jicama without peeling them.

Eventually, after about a year overall of training and when the orclings were about three-quarters grown in size, the time came for them to leave Ancora.

Led by their Papa, the eighteen passed through a magical doorway in the smooth face of a cliff.

Many magical doorways in Ancora led to the human world, some of them to different time periods. While the orclings may have been ready to leave Ancora, Breccan felt that the world of humans would only be ready to receive eighteen at once during a certain point in history, when the many self-sustaining communities came into being in defiance of the Supercities.

The group came out of another cliff doorway (one generally invisible except when in use) in Arkansas, where they shortly headed their separate ways after saying goodbye to their Papa who had given each of them a pack full of supplies—like food, water, sun hats, toenail clippers, and such—to help them along until they found their respective communities and got settled.

After a couple of years, Breccan decided to check on the orclings, to see where they all were and what they were up to. He did this in his spare time, and it ended up taking him nearly three years to track down all of the eighteen because they had pretty well spread themselves out over much of North America.

Hinn was quietly living in a horse barn on a large farm, and he seemed to enjoy tending to the horses (brushing, blanketing, changing out straw in the stalls, feeding, and so on), which the people on the farm very much appreciated since this was a lot of work. In his spare time, Hinn liked to collect pretty leaves, which he then pressed into books for safekeeping, and so he could keep them handy for looking at once in a while.

On another farm halfway across the country, Hil also lived in a barn, but one mainly occupied by goats, which he didn't have much to do with because he was more into helping in the garden. In addition to cultivating, planting, fertilizing, weeding, and harvesting, he grew a variety of marigolds alongside the furrows in order to help keep bugs away from the assorted fruits and vegetables.

Living in a dugout on a hilly ranch, Pei was quite the asset to the large self-sustaining community, mainly doing stonework; in fact, he was doing all of it for the ranch because he was so eager and capable. In addition to building stone houses and outbuildings, he

loved to lay stacked-stone fencing. And he was so good at this, he could often complete half a mile of stone fence in a single day, which quite astounded the people living in the area, who basically thought Pei to be the Grandest and Strongest Orc Ever! Though, like all orcs, he was not good-natured and tended to grumble a lot. But this served as a lesson in the community, especially to young children, that we can never know what might lie beneath a grumpy exterior (like a good and willing heart), so it's important to give folks the benefit of the doubt and a chance.

Both Pofir and Pum lived in little huts on the outskirts of two sizeable mothership settlements that were about five hundred miles apart from each other.

Pofir helped in his community by taking on large building projects. And he once built a warehouse entirely by himself from the ground up.

Pum, it seemed, was expert in finding children lost in woods, corn fields, slough grasses, etc. And he not only found ones lost from his own community, but was often called upon to find other lost kiddos across an entire region. People were keeping track of his finds, and the tally so far had reached twenty-eight. In taking a small peek into Pum's future, we find the number having grown into the hundreds by the end of his lifetime.

Hai and Poh both lived in treehouses in large lake communities, though not near one another.

Hai's main job was to help an elderly widower match up socks because the man had eyesight problems. So too did Hai help the man avoid confusing baking soda with sugar on a number of occasions.

Poh was in charge of major equipment repair in his community, which was quite a task considering everything involved with septic systems, greenhouses, water collection tanks, wind turbines, etc. He also worked with firefighters on occasion.

Pwee and Pol lived in caves not far from one another, but were each part of separate communities.

Pwee had taken on blacksmithing on a rather large scale that included farm equipment, fencing, tool making, horseshoeing, and the making of hardware like hinges and knobs for furniture, doors, cabinets, etc.

Pol traveled quite a bit to work with the Underground Army; and he had the extremely important job of replenishing supplies such as food, maps, and weapons in hidden caches designed to help travelers escaping from enslavement in the work camps and Supercities. Pol had many times during his replenishing missions faced down members of the ESS (the Enforcement Services Squad). He had also tangled with megahobs, and sorcerers riding on nyregs. Being a tough fellow, the orc had survived these encounters with no major injuries and only a few scars. Based on his heroics so far, he had already received two military medals, which he kept in a little wall case in his cave.

Haan, Haq, and Hew all lived in hollowed-out haystacks on large farms and all were mainly involved with gardening.

In addition to gardening, of which he was expert in growing asparagus and beets, Haan had taken up knitting.

Haq mainly helped tend an apple orchard, enjoying most of all the climbing of the ladders. He also occasionally helped owners of the farm with minor home repairs.

Added to his gardening chores, Hew, it seemed, was often occupied with keeping a particular terrier out of trouble, mainly the trouble of digging in people's gardens. So too did the orc often clean the little dog's feet, to keep him from tracking dirt into his owner's house.

When looking in on these three of his orclings, Breccan observed many more of their everyday activities as well, such as helping to keep horses calm during storms, picking up bits of broken glass, carrying baskets in and out of root cellars, helping to birth lambs, sanding chairs to eliminate splinters, loosening the lids of jars for people, etc.

Huf and Huut both lived in lean-tos in separate mothership communities.

Huf mainly liked to untangle threads and ribbons in sewing boxes.

Huut was most interested in canning activities, with peach butter and peach syrup being his favorite things to both make and eat.

Both Puu and Pah lived in roomy and sturdy tents that were much like teepees.

Puu lived in a region notorious for mudslides and flash flooding, and he was in charge of the massive and ongoing erosion-control measures in his community.

In another part of the country, Pah was into timbering that was entirely renewable in that hundreds of new trees were being planted each year to replenish the ones being used. He absolutely loved trees, with walnuts and maples being his favorites.

Breccan had worried most about Heef who, when first abandoned by his parents as a newborn, had gotten his left leg caught in a fence. As a result, the leg hadn't grown properly and was shorter than the right one, as well as lacking in strength and often sore. So too was his left foot smaller and weaker than the right, frequently giving him pain. The genie cobbler had made special shoes for him, but the skills of genies could only go so far. As a result, he walked a bit straighter, but the left leg and foot still gave him problems.

Heef could have stayed in Ancora, but he hadn't wanted to. Instead, he wanted to be out in the world like his brothers, doing what he felt he was supposed to do, which was look after himself while helping others.

In looking in on Heef, Breccan found him to be doing a fairly good job of looking after himself. He was living in a little shed on a farm. He could have lived in the barn or in a cabin that had been offered to him by the owner of the farm, but he was content with the shed. For one thing, the shed had a window and the barn didn't; Heef very much liked to look at the stars and moon at night. And the

cabin would have been too big to keep clean, whereas, the shed was just the right size.

Expending most of his energy taking care of himself, Heef was often too tired to do much of anything else, though he did shake out the farmhouse front doormat each day and help to collect eggs from the henhouse.

The farmer's wife had taught him how to make an omelet, with butter, cheese, salt, and pepper added to the eggs, along with a little water to make the omelet fluffy. While he probably liked sweet potatoes and turnips better, Heef had decided he liked eggs; and he was doing a good job of taking care of his frying pan and spatula. Also, he always remembered to unplug the little hotplate in his shed each time after using it.

Since Heef had trouble climbing the three stairs in front of the door to his shed, and the four to get into the henhouse, the farmer had built him a couple of short ramps that were easier to navigate.

While he wanted to do a lot more than what he was doing as far as helping out on the farm, Heef was often resigned to simply standing by and watching while certain activities were going on. He wanted to help with weeding the cucumbers and peppers, but he couldn't. He wanted to sweep the front and back porches of the farmhouse, but he couldn't. He wanted to corral the pigs, but he couldn't. So he mainly just stood by and watched on most days.

Observing some of this during his visit, Breccan thought of a line from a favorite poem of his, by John Milton. "They also serve who only stand and wait." Serve God that is, and His purposes, because it was just fine for Heef to be doing exactly what he could do, and nothing more, which meant the orc would sometimes simply stand by and wait, while the world spun and activities whizzed by around him.

Making his presence known to Heef, Breccan again confirmed that this was the life Heef wanted, and that he didn't want to come back to Ancora to live. Heef definitely wanted to stay on the farm. However, Breccan did take the opportunity to give him a magic

watermelon seed that, if planted, would send a signal to Breccan to come and get him.

After presenting the seed to the orcling and giving him a kiss on the cheek, the genie left. (By the way, Breccan would always consider the eighteen to be “orclings” even though they were all fully grown by this time.) Heef would keep the seed safe all the rest of his life, but never plant it.

Penn was the last orcling Breccan managed to catch up with, and he found him at a banquet being held in Penn’s honor in the mothership community he was part of. Apparently, the orc had single-handedly killed a flash dragon that was attacking the community.

Receiving cheers and a trophy, Penn was blushing as he accepted these things, along with an entire batch of snickerdoodle cookies to take home with him to his cabin on the outskirts of the settlement.

As Penn was trotting home with his trophy and cookies, Breccan made his presence known to him.

Overjoyed to see his Papa, Penn presented him with a cookie, after which, Breccan listened to the story of how the orc had killed the flash dragon, by climbing to the top of a tall windmill and leaping onto the swooping beast, whom Penn then wrestled to the ground, ripping at his wings, while punching and strangling the evil creature.

Because Penn was excited, the grunting and garbled speech came out in rather a strange order as far as the actual sequence of events; but Breccan got the story pretty well, afterwards giving his orcling a pat on the shoulder and a kiss on the forehead before bidding him farewell and leaving.

To the pat and kiss, Penn blushed even more than he had at the banquet, because he truly felt he didn’t need any recognition for doing what he felt he was supposed to be doing anyway. And while he had gotten burned on his right knee from the fight with the flash

dragon, the local healer had applied a salve to the burn, which was healing up nicely.

Genies know many things that humans don't, particularly with regard to magical creatures, and Breccan knew about a special book located somewhere in the heavens in which an invisible hand was recording the good deeds of the orclings. From the deeds recorded in this book, the afterlife rewards of the eighteen would be determined.

Genies also have various ways of looking into the future. On a particular afternoon when Breccan had some free time, he decided to do just that, looking into the eye of a magical peacock feather to see what would become of his eighteen orclings when they passed from this life into the next. Of course, in their heavenly homes, all eighteen had new and different forms, but were still very recognizable to Breccan individually as being the orclings he had helped to raise.

Hai and Poh both lived in large treehouses, with the two houses being nearly identical as far as room sizes and furnishings such as soft rugs, plush sofas, silky drapes, and comfy hammocks. They loved living high up in the clouds where they could talk to various birds and butterflies, some nearly as large as motorboats.

Pol, Haan, Huut, and Pwee all lived in exquisite caves full of crystals and interesting rock formations, as well as lovely tapestries, couches, beds, tables, bookshelves, and such. Even though each of the caves was fairly sprawling and large, the orclings felt cozy enough in their comfortable surroundings. Outdoors, in assorted venues within their communities, they enjoyed a variety of activities with others such as gardening, golfing, croquet, cycling, performing music, and hiking.

Haq had his own cliff dwelling, and he absolutely loved the ladders used to access various sections of his home because they reminded him of the ladders in the apple orchard he had helped tend on earth. And speaking of apples, several lovely hanging apple trees were growing on the cliff face of his home. When the fruit was ripe,

the branches would lean towards the windows so that he could pick the apples without even having to leave the house.

Pofir, Pum, Hil, Huf and Puu all had quaint cottages in communities with large gardens in which they loved to spend much of their time, even occasionally sleeping outdoors in open-air pavilions, or in gazebos, or simply on blankets spread out inside areas hedged by lovely ivies, shrubs, and flowers of various shapes, colors, and scents.

Pei and Hinn lived in nearly identical dugout homes in a lovely, boulder-strewn ravine, which they enjoyed spending time in amongst creeks and small waterfalls, while sometimes resting in chairs made of springy moss or piles of colorful leaves.

Hinn, who had once helped a weaver on earth dye threads for various projects, became a weaver himself, and made many beautiful fabrics, rugs, and wall hangings.

Pah and Hew each resided in two-story forest cabins all decked out with fireplaces, nice kitchens, large living areas, and sprawling decks. Both became accomplished cooks and basketmakers, sharing their creations with many of their neighbors and friends, who were likewise accomplished in many crafts and who also liked to share.

Penn lived in a city setting, in a tall house in which he had a special shelf for a replica of the trophy he had received for saving his mothership community from the flash dragon. The trophy sat alongside copies of a couple of other awards he had gotten over the years, one for repairing a dam and another for building a huge bridge all by himself.

Heef lived down the street from Penn in what could only be described as a tall palace in which he most of all loved to climb the stairs. With nothing at all wrong anymore with either his left leg or foot (or any other bits of him), nothing hindered him from doing this.

He also liked to take care of the palace, where he could sweep and dust to his heart's content, while rearranging various knickknacks. Opening and closing certain shutters throughout the day to change the light and air inside the palace were some of his

favorite activities as well, along with straightening wall pictures, especially when he was expecting visitors.

Heef also kept busy helping his neighbors with chores, like moving heavy potted plants, brushing their dogs and cats, and scrubbing windows.

Putting aside the peacock feather after his peek into the future, Breccan felt very satisfied in knowing that all eighteen of his little orclings had done very well for themselves indeed, not only in their earthly lives, but in their heavenly ones as well.

““He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much.””
Luke 16:10

The Waiting Gryphix

A gryphix named Dallam once traveled back in time to perform a series of very important godly tasks. But before we learn about his adventures, we must step back for a moment to find out exactly what a gryphix is, particularly because they are very rare in the world, so rare in fact that some folks believe them to be only recently created by God. In truth, they have existed throughout history, though, like many of God's servants, they mainly work behind the scenes.

Gryphixes are magical creatures that are something like a cross between a gryphon and a phoenix. Although roughly the same size as gryphons, gryphixes have slightly more feathers and slightly less fur by comparison; and their coloring tends to be a little more on the fiery side, with more reds and burnt oranges mixed into the golds that tend to signify regular gryphons, as opposed to snow gryphons that are mainly white. Gryphixes have a lot of the same skills as gryphons—such as excellent hearing and eyesight, super speed, incredible strength and fighting talent, and the ability to produce and direct energy with their wings. However, gryphixes definitely possess one extra skill: They have the power to raise the dead.

Now, back to Dallam, who was in the process of traveling back in time by means of a unicorn, the unicorn having been summoned by a genie because gryphixes don't have the power to call unicorns, while genies do. And in case we might be wondering, unicorns have the power to time travel because they can move faster than the speed of light.

God had called upon Dallam to make this journey precisely because of the rarity of gryphixes, who, like many other types of magical creatures, couldn't exist in abundance in our world at various times throughout history due to a shortage of human

goodness, the food needed to sustain them. (While many magical creatures eat other kinds of foods, human goodness is what keeps them alive.)

Dallam was thoroughly enjoying the trip through time. He hadn't needed to hop aboard the unicorn; nor would this have been a good idea since, not even counting his wings, Dallam was slightly larger than the unicorn. Instead, floating alongside the magnificent golden creature, the gryphix was simply holding onto a few silky strands of the unicorn's mane that was the color of soft sunshine glancing off of smooth platinum. The rippling colors surrounding them as they traveled reminded Dallam of the aurora borealis as seen at either dawn or sunset, but with extra colors added that might have equaled rainbows of many shades. Other than a slight tickle in his brain, he felt no movement at all, not even a ruffle of a single feather.

The gryphix was from Russia and made his home in that large and beautiful country. Now, his travels back in time were taking him to Russia, to the year 1828 to be exact. Dallam had been incredibly thrilled (and had almost fainted with joy) when God told him that He was assigning him to be protector for none other than Leo Tolstoy.

Being an avid reader, like all gryphixes, Dallam absolutely adored the writings of Tolstoy, particularly his short stories, which the gryphix found every bit as meaningful as the epic tales the author was most famous for.

As the unfelt motion around him suddenly stopped, and the unicorn simply disappeared in a soft blink of golden light, Dallam found himself in Tula Province in Russia, where Tolstoy was born a mere week after the arrival of the gryphix to the area.

Dallam was assigned as protector because Tolstoy was destined to write godly stories that would inspire people for many generations to come. In addition to the angels constantly looking out for God's children, many of us have additional protectors assigned, largely

because the forces of evil in our world, though often unseen, are incredibly prevalent, with some also being extremely powerful.

In truth, in Tolstoy's day, these were not much like the dangers humans were facing in Dallam's own time, like the fire of flash dragons and deadly attacks by invisible stealth hobs. But while magical malice was less prominent in 1828, dangers could still be present, such as those of war.

Since magical creatures like gryphixes often worked clandestinely, Dallam was able to stay largely unnoticed by most human beings, including his charge, during his stay in the Russia of the past.

After protecting Tolstoy as a young boy, mostly from dangers within the flow of everyday activities (like simple household mishaps and common outdoor accidents), Dallam watched over Tolstoy during his time at war in the Army, and then again at home during his life of mainly writing, farming, and raising a family.

Watching the man's writing career with interest, the gryphix even managed an occasional peek into Tolstoy's journals, where he found the personal thoughts of the man very interesting, particularly since the notes ended up being used as the basis for many stories.

In case we might be wondering, the winters in Russia were not a problem for Dallam, as gryphixes are made to withstand cold weather, much like their distant cousins—snow gryphons. In fact, based on God's instructions, which Dallam generally heard as a little voice in the back of his head, he once took a break from watching over Tolstoy to save two children, a brother and sister, from a blizzard that hit unexpectedly while they were walking home from school.

Sheltering the pair under one wing, a very toasty situation indeed for the kids since the fur and feathers of gryphixes give off natural warmth, Dallam simply waited until the storm cleared so that he could see well enough to fly the children safely home on his back, giving them each a hug as he dropped them off at the front door of their house.

God might have had an angel protect the children, except for Dallam being handy in the area. In truth, it was no accident that Tolstoy wrote about angels because they tended to watch over him too, as they do many people, though most of us are unaware of their presence.

In contemplating his protection duties over the years, the gryphix often thought, *I'm a little like a substitute angel.*

Dallam never had to use his skill of raising the dead with Tolstoy because the man lived a long life and died naturally once his earthly work was complete, exactly as God had planned for him.

After the death of Tolstoy in 1910, Dallam stayed in the area for about thirty years before moving on to perform another important task on God's instructions, but one that wouldn't take nearly as long as the first; though this one would be the most troubling of anything Dallam in his entire life would experience. He was to raise a single person from the dead, a woman who had been gassed in a concentration camp in Poland and whose body had then been thrown into a ditch.

Dallam did this very easily, using ashes from a combusted feather plucked from his neck that would then be regrown. The moment the ashes touched the woman's body, she instantly came back to life.

After raising her from the dead, the gryphix delivered her safely to a group of people in a secret location who specialized in protecting those being persecuted at that time.

What was troubling was that Dallam was only allowed to raise one person from the dead, and he was not allowed to save hundreds of others in the same camp from being tortured, starved, experimented on, and murdered, which he could have done in a flash given his skills. However, although sickened and saddened by what he was seeing, Dallam had to adhere to God's instructions, particularly in knowing that the Father's thoughts and reasoning were far above his own, and in having trust that everything happening was in accordance with the Lord's Overall Plan. For

some reason, God was allowing these horrors to happen; and magical creatures, no matter how much they might want to, had no right to interfere.

Being from the future, what Dallam found most sickening was that these types of things tended to cycle, repeating themselves because of sin and human nature, even including denial of history and failing to learn from it. He had personally witnessed a resurgence of this type of hatred, though mostly against Christians rather than Jews, set to begin less than a hundred years into the future.

Christians were scorned and marginalized, even called mentally ill. Bibles were banned, burned, and so on. Laws were changed that didn't allow Christians to do business or hold jobs. Eventually, they were put away, tortured, and killed in a close repeat as to what had happened during the Holocaust; except this was all done openly, in Supercities and work camps, rather than being hidden away. Since this was happening worldwide, there was no reason, nor any way, to shield the horrible activities of the perpetrators from the eyes of the rest of the world.

Because he needed to stay in the past to perform the rest of his series of tasks, Dallam wasn't planning to travel back to the future by unicorn. Therefore, he was sad over the prospect of having to witness many of these evil events again as the years progressed.

However, he was able to take some small comfort in knowing that he would also be able to again live through many exciting and wonderful things such as witnessing the first moon walk, being able to watch episodes of *I Love Lucy* as they first aired on black-and-white television, and even sampling certain candy bars as they were invented. And he would come to discover that it is often the smallest delights in life that can truly uplift a weary spirit.

While Dallam would be staying out of most events as far as influence, he would have a hand in helping to make something of great magical importance come about, this being the use of dragon tears to heal injuries and raise the dead.

At the time the gryphix brought the woman in Poland back to life, dragons were incredibly scarce in the world, with most of them sleeping inside volcanoes. Also, the thimble that was needed to correctly measure the tears hadn't even been invented, which meant that even if human beings could access a dragon and convince the creature to cry, the shed tears would be useless because the dose needed to either heal an injury or raise the dead had to be exact. Thus, Dallam's next task would be to help this important thimble get made, this happening shortly after his trip to Poland.

Instead of God giving him these instructions, a genie named Hadleigh contacted him, afterwards leading Dallam to a certain castle in Scotland located on a small secluded island. The castle itself wasn't even visible to anyone passing by the island because it was magically disguised to look like rock domes and spires, though the gryphix and the genie were able to see through the deception.

The residents of the castle were elves, with elves being even scarcer than dragons at this time, though not as scarce as gryphixes. However, elves tended to stay completely out of sight and away from humans. But being godly creatures, they did perform tasks on the Lord's commands, in this case, the making of the first thimble to measure dragon tears correctly with regard to human healing and raising certain persons from the dead.

According to Hadleigh, only a twelf could properly make the thimble, a twelf being the twelfth elf born to a family. With twelve being a very godly number, a twelfth elf couldn't help but be extra powerful as far as elven magic. Plus, since all twelfs are masters of both mathematics and metallurgy, this basically made them the only creatures with the right qualifications to complete the task at hand. This particular twelf was named Levegō.

Dallum's job would be to secure the metal for the silver thimble, along with a couple of ancient reference books Levegō needed from a library inside a monastery fortress in Austria, the books having been taken from the elves some time previous by certain monks who had a small feud with the elves over the ownership of the books.

Getting a chunk of silver (from a mine in Peru) was easy; in fact, just about any creature could have done it. However, getting into the monastery for the two books posed something of a problem because the monks didn't allow any visitors, not even magical ones like genies and gryphixes.

The solution, it seemed, was for Hadleigh to put a spell on Dallam, giving him shapeshifting powers for a short time so that he could impersonate various things like monks, tables, pillars, potted plants, and such. Thus, he should be able to slip in and out of the monastery to procure the books fairly easily.

And the task did prove largely easy, except for when Dallam, after acquiring the books, was trying to exit the stone fortress. Apparently, the gryphix had made the mistake of imitating a monk that another monk had just seen in an adjacent corridor. When an alarm was raised, Dallam soon found himself being chased by several monks.

However, he was able to escape by rapidly shifting back to his normal gryphix form and using energy from two flaps of his wings to shut and hold closed a heavy door separating himself from his pursuers, afterwards leaving through a large window to fly off with the books to Scotland.

Whew, Dallam thought, *that was a close call*. He wasn't a natural thief, you see, as no gryphixes are.

The actual making of the thimble proved easy for Levegō, though the endeavor was somewhat time-consuming. It seemed smaller tasks often took him the most time, due to the issue of having to be incredibly precise with various important mathematical calculations.

By contrast, making use of his stronger powers, such as control over large bodies of water, often took him no time at all. Indeed, Levegō could divert a huge river in a matter of a couple of minutes, while the making of the thimble took him nearly three weeks.

Dallam and Hadleigh mostly stayed away during this time, leaving the twelf to it, mainly because Levegō wasn't particularly

personable. In truth, he had other projects he wanted to work on, so the making of the thimble had somewhat messed up his schedule. But he knew it had to be done, and so he did it. We are all of us wise to following God's instructions, doing everything exactly as He asks of us.

When complete, the thimble was lovely, having an intricate pattern of little diamond shapes encircling the top half.

At a certain time in the future, the genies would be called upon to multiply this all-important object, to the extent that literally millions would come in existence for use by godly people worldwide in conjunction with dragon tears to heal and raise the dead. But for now, the silver thimble was meant to be singular.

Carefully carrying the precious item, Dallam delivered it to a sewing basket in a home in the United States, in Alabama to be exact, where it would stay for several decades. Eventually, the thimble would move to another home, to be discovered and given into the keeping of a young girl who was just learning how to summon unicorns, and who would eventually learn the secret of the thimble as well.

Dallam's next task was not going to be for a while; and so he decided to return to Russia, where he felt most at home. He would need to be patient while waiting.

While exercising patience, the gryphix spent much of his time reading, making use of several libraries in Russia. Over the next few years, he made a point of keeping up with the ongoing news involving the finding of the Dead Sea Scrolls; and then, later on, the exciting conclusions that human beings were making from them.

Dallam also made a point of reading everything Tolstoy, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling, and C.S. Lewis ever wrote. These were, of course, only some his favorite writers. He read many other things too, especially the *Holy Bible*, which he read cover to cover many times in his life. His favorite book in the bible was Isaiah, though he enjoyed all of God's Word.

Dallam would eventually be assigned as official protector to another human being, but not for nearly a century. In the meantime, in addition to reading, he made friends with a couple of wind horses in Russia.

He traveled on occasion, to get to know a snow gryphon living in the Himalayas, and to consult with a godly conjure woman also living there. From his conversations with the woman, Dallam was getting the idea that God might someday tell him to give her a few of his Renewal Feathers. This would be fine with him; not only were the feathers easily regrown, Dallam firmly believed they were made for sharing.

As one of his tasks over the years, the gryphix diverted flows of lava from a volcano in Central America to save several hundred people from a scorching death. The heat from the volcano didn't bother him, and the job was fairly easily accomplished using wing-flap energy. At around the same time, he was not instructed to divert lava from a volcano erupting in Hawaii, probably because fewer people were being threatened, he reckoned, and had easier means of escape than those he had helped in Central America.

Another assignment involved sneaking a stolen painting out of a private museum in Colombia and returning it to its rightful owners, a husband and wife living in Australia.

Since this was a heist similar to the one at the monastery, Hadleigh again helped by putting a shapeshifting spell on Dallam, who felt much like Cinderella in a hurry when acquiring the painting because the spell was set to expire at midnight, and getting through several locked doors at the museum had taken him some time.

Blessedly, all went well and he recovered the painting, which he then immediately delivered to the couple's residence in Australia. The painting needed to be there so that a puck troll in the not-so-distant future could bring it to life for the express purpose of hiding people inside, mainly Christians being persecuted and hunted by the sorcerers and their followers.

Unexpectedly discovering the painting in their home only moments after the gryphix delivered it, the husband said to his wife, “An angel must have brought it.”

Dallam heard the comment as he was leaving. *Or a substitute angel*, he thought.

“Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your habitation, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways.” Psalm 91:9-11

Wrengo's Wooden Soldiers

A puck troll named Wrengo who liked to whittle decided to set up a woodcarving shop in one corner of a barn located on the Laurelstone Plantation in Alabama.

While many puck woodcarvers made large creations, like life-size people and animals, Wrengo found he preferred working on smaller projects, most often ranging from around the size of his thumb to just a little taller than his own height of roughly six inches.

With puck trolls being as capable of bringing their own artistic creations to life as they were the works of others, Wrengo occasionally awakened his woodcarvings, mostly just to keep him company while he worked, his main companions these days being a hedgehog named Prickles and a cat named Calico, both of which liked to roll around in wood shavings and occasionally bring Wrengo various tools.

This being a rather stressful time in the world, when the Supercities were in full swing, Wrengo often fretted about the people living in the cities, in particular, the children of the poor, who were not only in danger from the malice of the sorcerers that often stole them from their families to turn them into slaves and organ donors for the elites, but also from various menaces like megahobs, gremlins, nyregs, and various forms of demons.

Over the years, Wrengo had helped stave off some of these same dangers in communities outside of the Supes by making life-size wooden statues—such as a gryphon, a moose, a lumberjack, and a mustang—that could come to life to protect people. Even if only brought to life one time by a puck troll, artistic creations like statues and topiaries could come to life on their own by way of Memory Magic. Thus, these large carvings Wrengo had made and awakened

had been a tremendous help to many people in various earthship communities, mothership settlements, self-sustaining ranches, etc.

However, since large projects were not particularly his forte, Wrengo had recently been thinking that maybe some of his smaller works might serve a similar purpose.

Like pocket protectors, Wrengo thought.

This seemed a good idea to him, since many small things could be particularly helpful. He was specifically thinking of his tools; many of his chisels and mallets were pocket size and were definitely helpful.

Pocket size for a child would be about my size, Wrengo reasoned, *maybe a little smaller*.

And so, with this in mind, he set to carving a wooden soldier to be just about his size, but maybe a little smaller.

Now this wasn't like an old-timey children's toy soldier; rather, Wrengo patterned his protective little man after the soldiers he was familiar with who were members of the Underground Army that was actually headquartered in secret caverns located beneath the Laurelstone Plantation.

After carving a man, Wrengo next carved two women soldiers.

Just from observation, he had noticed that there seemed to be nearly as many women enlisted in the Underground Army as men; and so he felt his little army should be patterned this way too. And, indeed, he did plan to create an army of these carvings, so that as many children as possible in the cities could have these little pocket protectors.

In case we might be wondering what good something pocket size might be as a protector against something large like a nyreg or megahob, we must consider that these were military soldiers, capable of using weapons as well as their brains. And many were very skilled. Plus, wood is often very strong, and durable; and trees have natural gifts such as some species being bendier than others, or less porous, or less prone to attacks by things like fungus and beetles. Also, since these were soldiers, they were equipped with

packs that would be awakened along with those carrying them to provide an arsenal of weapons and other equipment for use in their protection duties.

Wrengo mainly used fallen branches for his woodworking, ones ripped off by storms or naturally shed by trees. He also used bamboo, which was being grown in several pockets (magical mini-realms) on the Laurelstone Plantation, the bamboo being incredibly strong and flexible. So too did a thunderbird friend of his named Lydu bring him Liget Tree branches from Lion Mountain in Tennessee. Grown for firewood and construction purposes, the fast-growing Liget Trees were completely sustainable.

For a little variety, Wrengo carved a few critters like wolverines, dogs, bears, beavers, etc. that were all sized to fit with the wooden soldiers.

They can be companions and helpers to the soldiers, he thought, having kept Prickles and Calico in mind when making these additions to the army.

Working for several weeks on this project, Wrengo had nearly two hundred soldiers and about forty companion critters made. And while he was making progress, he became a little dismayed in thinking that there were many thousands of children in the Supercities who needed these helpers. So even if he worked around the clock, and for many years, there would never be enough to go around. But, alas, he would simply have to do the best he could do, and be satisfied with that, because he was only one puck troll after all.

However, as we all well know, God can and does work in many wondrous ways. On this occasion, the Lord planted a thought into the mind of a girl genie named Alata to look in on Wrengo's woodcarving shop. Upon seeing the rather glorious little army, Alata very much wanted to help. And as we all well know, the genies didn't have the nickname of Great Multipliers for nothing.

Deciding to borrow various empty horse stalls, of which there were many because this was a large barn, Alata set to work right

away multiplying Wrenco's creations, to the extent that thousands of soldiers and hundreds of companion critters became available right away for Wrenco to awaken, which he did. Then, the soldiers and companions simply needed to be a little patient, until the genie and puck could figure out how to deliver them to the children of the Supercities.

This problem was easily solved when Alata remembered the Owl Fleet that was working with the Underground Army on some sort of secret project. Of many varieties—including spotted, tawny, barn, screech, pygmy, great gray, and more—all were willing to help with this endeavor.

And so, the many thousands of soldiers and hundreds of companions began being delivered to the children of the Supercities, and not just the cities in the United States (of which there were fourteen), but Supes all over the world.

In order not to draw undue attention, the soldiers and companions often stayed settled (as in, non-awakened); however, they could come to life very quickly through Memory Magic. Thus, they were able to provide a variety of protection duties.

Equipped with tiny versions of rose-colored glasses that allowed them to see invisible and camouflaged creatures, the little soldiers smashed the toes and ankles of troublesome gremlins to drive them away. Using wits and weapons, the small protectors also defended well against attacks by nyregs, demons, and megahobs, the attacks by these being somewhat rare against humans in the cities (because the sorcerers didn't want their "slaves" slain, just subservient), but they did occasionally occur. Whenever possible, the soldiers helped children escape from organ donor facilities, and various sweat shops inside many factories.

Quite a few of the protectors were skilled in simply keeping children calm in various stressful situations, and the critter companions often delighted in being friends and playing with the kids. Also, soldier trainers taught whole families assorted combat

skills like how to use a sling, wilderness survival, archery, and stick fighting.

Various magical weapons were also available to those living in the cities, with many of these being hidden in plain sight. Therefore, training in use of ropes, flutes, mirrors, etc. was also part of the wooden soldiers' agenda.

So too did they occasionally help obtain medicine and food for families, the soldiers' small sizes and clandestine skills (like picking locks and keeping to shadows) perfectly lending to successful sneaks in and out of various storehouses, cabinets, sheds, etc.

Some of the soldiers also functioned as teachers, which were extremely needed in the Supers because the schools were doing a poor job of educating at this time, in addition to denying truths, while attempting to brainwash children into accepting various unhealthy ideals.

Though all of the wooden soldiers were incredibly skilled, oddly enough, one of the most notable services a particular male soldier ever performed was biting a sorcerer hard on one ankle. This happened in Supercity Eleven at a time when the sorcerer was dragging a teenage boy out of a classroom to be put into a locked detention facility for talking about God and the *Holy Bible* to his school friends. The bite made the sorcerer lose his grip on the boy, who escaped and was subsequently hidden with his family in a pocket in the city from which many people were helped by a special division of the Underground Army called NUR to escape from the Supercities.

The sorcerer never figured out what bit him, since it couldn't have been the small wooden doll sitting on the floor by the teacher's desk. Assuming a gremlin had attacked his ankle, the man didn't give another thought to the wooden figure.

Even when seeing others like the one in the school throughout the city over the next few years, the sorcerer never thought anything strange of these little wooden soldiers. After all, they were small. *What much of anything could these small soldiers do in the world?*

The sorcerer might better have asked what much of anything his obviously small brain was doing for him. In truth, most of his kind had limited thinking, and never would have been capable of imagining that an entire army could stem from the efforts of a single puck troll, with a little help from a genie. Sadly, many people tend to disregard small things that can and do wield great power, including the power of the heart.

Since Alata had helped him so much with his soldier project, Wrengo had plenty of time to work on other carvings, such as a tortoise for a bigfoot, a road runner for one of the teachers at the Laurelstone Schools, and a horse for the lady running the hippotherapy program at the plantation. He also carved a special ladybug as a present for Alata, who absolutely adored ladybugs, as well as many other types of insects.

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment. For the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” John 7:24, 1 Samuel 16:7

From the Gold Diary



Snickare's First Project

Snickare, an elderly genie carpenter, was preparing for a trip by packing his little tool bag. Tiny on the outside, but much bigger within, the bag easily held the many hammers, vices, scales, plumb bobs, saws, sanding blocks, lathes, and such that he was stuffing into it.

Over his lifetime, Snickare had helped to build towers in India and Japan, ships in Spain, and even castles in Austria, before heading overseas to the United States where he helped to construct some of the earliest libraries and courthouses in Pennsylvania and Virginia. He then helped certain pioneers build sturdy forts, as well as personal dwellings of many sorts.

In later years, he mainly took on residential projects such as helping many elderly poor with home repairs and other fixing-up projects like restoring driveways and fencing.

Presently engaged in doing a few things around his own home, he was virtually retired, except for a bit of furniture and cabinet making here and there.

Now, though nearly officially retired, he was set to take on one last big project, which would involve a time-travel trip, way far back in time, to well before he was even born. And, for that matter, before even his parents or grandparents had been born.

He was taking the trip on God's orders and traveling by unicorn to do so because his activities needed to be kept completely separate from those of others who were using the four time-travel portals currently existing in the world.

In case we might be wondering, genies have the power to call unicorns, who can time travel because they possess the ability to move faster than the speed of light.

After calling the golden creature, who appeared instantly in a soft flash of light, Snickare, while hovering next to the neck of the unicorn with his little tool bag, simply grasped a few strands of mane. Then, they were off.

During the travel, the carpenter could see colors moving all around them, but could feel no movement at all, except perhaps for a slight tickle in his brain.

At the end of the colorful but still journey through time, that didn't seem to last more than three minutes by Snickare's reckoning, the unicorn simply disappeared in a soft golden flash as the carpenter bid him farewell with a small nod.

Snickare had arrived in a wide valley bordered by a large wooded area through which several small rocky rivers and streams lazily meandered.

In the center of the valley, an enormous construction project was underway, this being Noah's Ark of the bible that was built so that certain humans and animals of many kinds could survive the Great Flood God had sent to destroy the entire earth and the wickedness it contained, which was absolutely depraved and horrendous, and sadly not unlike a lot of the history that Snickare himself had lived through.

He would need to be careful whilst engaged in this particular project not to disclose too many details about the future. For one thing, though people had biblical rules which they were supposed to live by, they didn't have the actual bible at this time. So he couldn't just go around quoting Scripture, and especially not New Testament Scripture, which he was fond of doing at home. Plus, he needed to be careful not to mention any events of history that were future to this time.

So keep your mouth shut about wars, inventions, and so forth, he reminded himself.

With regard to inventions, he would need to be very careful to remember to take all of his tools with him when leaving, since some

were advanced for this time, though most were of the basic type that even early builders could have fashioned for themselves.

Snickare was there to help Noah build the ark, which was nearly three-quarters complete by the time the genie carpenter arrived.

Despite the progress, Snickare would end up spending nearly a decade helping with the completion of the enormous vessel, his help being what kept the project on track to finish before the coming flood.

While Noah and his sons were very skilled, Snickare's expertise was of great value to them, particularly his magical skills. For instance, the genie carpenter was able to put all of the tools from his little bag into use all at once, on their own, without his having to handle them. Thus, the twenty-seven mallets, fifteen saws, forty sanding blocks, nineteen lathes, and so forth were able to make much progress, even when Snickare was asleep at nap, which he needed to be on occasion, given his age.

The genie carpenter was pleased with the wonderful materials God had given Noah to work with, particularly the plentiful gofer trees, which were strong and flexible, very like many of the pine trees of his own time. Though not quite as large as the redwoods, the gofers were still quite a bit bigger than the sugar pines and ponderosa pines Snickare was familiar with at home, so there was more than enough wood to work with.

Because this was a rather long project, the genie carpenter ended up doing a lot of thinking, particularly about the evil he was observing all around him, which was, of course, the whole reason for the coming flood.

With the exception of Noah and his family, all of humankind had gone corrupt. Wicked violence abounded, not only against human beings, but against many other creatures of the earth. Man's heart had gone dark and cruel, and his brain was only capable of evil imaginings.

Exactly as described in Genesis, Snickare thought when noting the cheating, murders, drunkenness, thievery, tortures, bullying, gluttony, and other sins basically too many in number to mention.

Along with various watchmen (also known as angels) whom God had sent to protect Noah and his family, Snickare had been using some of his magical skills to keep the evils in the area in check, so that the ark could be completed and the future of the human race protected. The animals, too, as they came to board the ark, needed to be protected. So the watchmen would stay at their posts until all were safely inside the ark.

Even in Snickare's time, there was a lot of debate as to whether or not God was just in what He had done. In Snickare's judgement, God could do whatever He liked with the inhabitants of the earth. People were not living by His rules, and so He was perfectly justified in wiping the slate clean of nearly all human beings and starting over, choosing with which to do so only the handful of people who were abiding by His rules and living as they should.

During some of his times of pondering, Snickare marveled at the weight of the clouds—how they could possibly hold so many tons of water and still float. Being a carpenter and not a cloud scientist, he didn't know exactly how this worked; and while he knew that scientists had an explanation, he also knew that godly magic was at least somehow involved, since God Himself had created the clouds, along with everything else that ever existed.

I can make a building, but I can't make it out of nothing, Snickare thought. *There has to be something to start with. And God made everything to start with, everything that ever existed or will exist, every speck, including human beings, which is why He has the right to do anything He wishes with His creation, including wipe it out when it becomes corrupt.*

Working on stalls, cages, paddocks, pens, etc. for the animals—as well as mangers, bins, troughs, and such—Snickare used genie magic to multiply them. Thus, the housing and other items that

would be needed for the care of the many creatures the ark was set to house were completed in speedy fashion.

The animals in pairs were starting to show up by this time, and Snickare marveled at the multitudes of birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals. Many, he had never seen the likes of, not even in his long lifetime so far.

So some must have gone extinct, he decided, this thought making him rather sad. He was also sad about what was about to happen to the masses of people.

However, in the midst of his sadness, a rather funny notion came to him that fairly made him roll around on the floor laughing: Although this was his last project, by timeline, it was actually his first.

My last project is really my first, he thought, with tears of laughter streaming from his eyes.

Things often seem to come full circle, particularly within time, and especially because time often isn't exactly what we think it is.

Snickare didn't laugh for long because the whole situation was very sad. In fact, he could feel a shadow overtaking his mirth, and mirroring the darkened clouds that were already gathering overhead.

When he was ready to leave, after saying goodbye to Noah and his family—and a few of the animals, birds, snakes, and such—Snickare carefully packed his tools and rather soberly called a unicorn to take him home.

He was not just sad over those about to be destroyed by flood, but about the depravity existing in his own time, which was nearly as bad as what he had just observed in the time of Noah.

Upon reaching his home and nodding farewell to the unicorn as the creature disappeared in a golden blink, Snickare thought, *The first time by flood, the second time by fire.*

Imagining how horrible it was going to be when God destroyed the earth by fire—this prophetic event set to occur at some unknown time in the future, which Snickare thought might be very close—the

genie carpenter desperately hoped as many people as possible would be saved from this horror.

They can only be saved by coming to Christ before that time, Snickare thought. Once saved, there would be no horror of fire and no Second Death for them, only Eternal Life.

So keep quoting Scripture, he reminded himself, having gotten out of the habit for a bit.

As if in answer to his thought, a rainbow suddenly appeared in the sky before him, lifting Snickare's heart and making him smile.

“Therefore wait for me,” says the LORD, “for the day when I arise as a witness. For my decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out upon them my indignation, all the heat of my anger; for in the fire of my jealous wrath all the earth shall be consumed.” Zephaniah 3:8

The Bigfoot and the Honey Badger

A bigfoot was once attracted to a mothership community in Kentucky precisely because several members of the community had planted a large hillside with pomegranate bushes, totaling fifty-four in number.

In truth, the people had done this precisely to attract a bigfoot, since the creatures were highly valued as members of many communities, most often living nearby in caves, of which there was no shortage in Kentucky.

Taking up residence in a rather cozy cave, the bigfoot helped tend the pomegranates, which he loved, as all bigfoots do. He also took care of two groves of peach trees. From the pomegranates and peaches, the bigfoot made extremely yummy syrups, jellies, preserves, and jams.

Also feeling the benefits of his attention were many large gardens in which the bigfoot was mainly a master of charming peppers. Based on his expertise, the peppers grew hot but not too hot, shy but not too shy, and angry but not too angry, all of this making them perfect for a variety of delicious hot sauces, salsas, and even pickles.

The bigfoot also set up a bee colony, which was precisely what the members of the mothership community had hoped for because, even more than with peppers, bigfoots were known for charming bees, who then produced the most amazing honey, often touted as the “Sweetest and Best in the World.”

However, in the same way the bigfoot had been attracted to the pomegranates, a honey badger was attracted to the honey the bees were producing; though he didn't particularly care if it was the

“Sweetest and Best in the World” because honey badgers like pretty much all honey equally.

While the bigfoot would have been happy to share some of the honey with the badger, unfortunately, the honey badger didn’t know how to share; and he was not at all interested in learning this valuable social skill that really everyone should learn, and practice.

Honey badgers were not even supposed to be in North America, and the bigfoot knew this. Thus, it was a mystery as to how this one ended up here.

Maybe he escaped from a zoo, the bigfoot pondered as an answer.

Whatever the answer, because the honey badger kept getting into the bee boxes, and kept eating *all* of the honey the bees were producing, the bigfoot was getting pretty frustrated, as were many members of the mothership community who were hoping for at least a small share of the yummy goldenness.

With help from people in his community, the bigfoot built a fence around the bee colony.

However, being nimble and strong, the honey badger easily climbed the fence.

Making the fence taller didn’t really work because the badger liked to climb, and height didn’t seem to matter to him. Plus, he was able to squeeze under the fence, which had been buried a few inches deep, but evidently not deep enough to deter the badger.

Putting his brain and muscle to the problem, the bigfoot remodeled the fence to make the top extremely smooth and difficult to climb, and he buried the bottom over two feet deep.

However, since the honey badger could also use his brain, and because he was every bit as determined (if not more so) than the bigfoot, the remodeling posed little problem for him. While he didn’t want to dig deeper, and even though the fence was too slippery at the top to climb, he could still get in by rolling rocks up against the fence and piling them very high. Then, he simply climbed on the rocks to get over the fence.

Noting this, the bigfoot moved all rocks he could find that might be suitable for the badger to use for rolling and climbing far away from the bee colony, which took him a long time.

The badger spent the time thinking. In knowing that it would take too long to roll enough rocks back in from great distances to make a good climbing pile next to the fence, he started eyeing the trees surrounding the bee colony, many of which were situated very near the fence and several of which were of the sort that were very bendy, even to the extent that they would bend toward the fence from the weight of his body climbing upon them. Thus, in answer to the lack of rocks, the honey badger simply climbed a bendy tree from which he jumped to land inside the fence.

Prizing trees very highly, the bigfoot would never have wanted to cut down any that were growing around the bee colony. Knowing he would have to think of something else, he next tried building better bee boxes, ones with locking mechanisms that would be harder for the badger to get into.

Sadly, this resulted in the badger simply smashing the boxes with a rock to get into them.

After making repairs, the bigfoot next placed the bee boxes high up on poles that the badger couldn't climb.

Unfortunately, in the same way that the badger could get into the enclosure by leaping from bendy trees outside, he could use the trees to leap onto the top of the fencing, from which it was simply another leap for him to land on the boxes on top of the high poles.

Next, the bigfoot tried modifying the top of the fence, to make it harder for the honey badger to land on.

But, alas, this didn't seem to deter the highly wily critter who seemed to be becoming even more adept at conquering each new challenge that was being set before him.

With no earthly contraptions working to deter the honey badger, the bigfoot began reading to the creature, choosing stories with lessons about gluttony, destructiveness, thievery, and the importance of sharing.

To these, the honey badger simply laughed because he didn't consider his love for honey to be gluttony. Nor did he think it important to share. Plus, honey badgers are often destructive and frequently engage in thievery; so since he was simply being his normal self, this one didn't see why he should all of a sudden want to change.

However, things were about to change, partly because a genie had been nearby this whole time observing what was happening with the bee colony. In addition to observing, the genie had been hoping that he might eventually get a small pot of honey since bigfoots and people in mothership communities liked to share.

The bigfoot at this point was at a complete loss as to what to do. He was actually contemplating simply picking the honey badger up and carrying him out of state, except for knowing about the nasty smell the badger could emit from his scent glands, which was even worse than that of a skunk. Plus, he thought it likely the badger would just eventually make his way back to the mothership community, for as determined as he seemed to be.

Though when thinking about moving the creature, the bigfoot vaguely wondered if maybe this was how the badger ended up being in the area of the mothership community in the first place. Perhaps he made such a pest of himself in some other place that someone moved him, maybe even engaging the services of a thunderbird, wind horse, or other such magical creature that would be capable of carrying the badger long distances.

Whatever, the bigfoot decided. At this point, the history didn't much matter since he wasn't trying to get the badger flown to Africa, which was where he actually belonged.

Nor was the genie, whose name was Fortem, planning to have the creature flown any place. However, because it seemed likely that no one but the badger was ever going to get any of the honey, something definitely needed to be done.

As one of their skills, genies, like bigfoots, have a way of charming bees, not necessarily to get them to make wonderful

honey, but more to have them do their bidding in other ways. In this case, Fortem charmed a thousand of the bees into following the honey badger around in a long string which swirled around his head to harass him whenever he was being still or moving slowly.

Sadly, this didn't at all faze the creature, who decided he liked the buzzing sounds and the slight breeziness from the movements of the bees' wings and bodies.

Though the string of bees hadn't worked, not giving up, Fortem set to thinking. Watching the bigfoot tend to the garden peppers gave him an idea that he shortly put into action.

Managing to find a small amount of honeycomb that the badger hadn't yet eaten, Fortem slathered it with the juice and seeds of a bunch of hot peppers.

Unfortunately, this didn't work because the badger decided he liked the spicy honeycomb that was hot but not too hot, shy but not too shy, and angry but not too angry.

Mmmmm, yummy, the badger thought as he munched. *Yes, yes, more please, more please.*

Nearly as confounded as the bigfoot, Fortem simply decided to pray, to ask for God's help and direction in this matter. This was probably what the genie should have done in the first place, and the bigfoot as well, for that matter.

In fact, the bigfoot had lately been quoting proverbs to the badger, in the hopes that some of the wise and scolding words might sink in. However, like a lot of us when we're distracted and struggling to make things happen all on our own, the bigfoot had forgotten to pray.

In truth, God has the answer to every one of our problems. We simply need to talk to Him, make our requests, and then let Him handle things. In fact, in Psalm 46:10, He even tells us to just settle down and let Him take care of us. "Be still, and know that I am God." The same psalm says that He is with us and that He will help us.

In this case, the answer to Fortem's prayer came the very next day, in the form of a man who was passing through the mothership community and only staying a couple of nights on his way to a large self-sustaining ranch where he would be working for a month or two.

Browning (known only by his last name) was highly sought after because he was a roustabout, basically, a jack-of-all-trades. In addition to having many valuable skills, roustabouts were incredibly hard working, though nomadic, which meant they liked to travel rather than staying put too long in any one spot. They also have terrific problem-solving skills.

Fortem knew that this was the answer to his prayer; and the bigfoot too was overjoyed to see the roustabout, who right away was able to look around and see what the problem was, afterwards coming up with a solution.

As it turns out, despite the name, honey was not the honey badgers' favorite food. In truth, the creatures much prefer bugs, snakes, and small rodents. With the numbers of these currently under control in the mothership community, the badger didn't actually have enough of his preferred foods in the area.

And so, the answer was simply to lure him to a spot about fifty miles away that was currently teeming with these creeping, crawling, and slithering delicacies. This was easily accomplished over a period of about a week by the genie, bigfoot, and roustabout working as a team to lay a trail of juicy grasshoppers, beetles, slugs, field mice, and such to accomplish the luring.

Once in his new location, the honey badger was perfectly content; though he found he sort of missed hearing the buzzing noises of the bees.

However, in making this spot his home for many years, the badger grew to like other sounds, such as those of birds chirping and tree trunks rubbing together. Plus, he even liked the sounds coming from a farming community nearby. Since the farm didn't raise bees, there was nothing to particularly attract the badger to the settlement,

even in years when the numbers of rodents, bugs, and snakes grew somewhat lean.

In truth, we need to be careful about what we attract, not only with our actions but even with our hopes. While a bigfoot might be good to have around, many other things might not be such a welcome gift.

“Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” Romans 12:12

Netherwind's Treehouse

On a plantation called Netherwind in Alabama, a lovely two-story treehouse in a grandfather oak was once damaged by a tornado to the extent that much of it needed to be rebuilt.

A group of gnomes living in the area decided to take on the project, with help from a couple of bigfoots who resided in caves on the plantation. As a result of their eagerness and excellent skills, the treehouse ended up being seven times the size of the original, with eight floors and sprawling additions that extended all the way to the ends of some of the sturdier branches. And not only was the treehouse much larger, the inside was even roomier than its outward appearance might suggest due to use of pod architecture based on magical triangular sciences. While gifted humans had only recently begun using these techniques, the likes of gnomes, genies, and bigfoots had been doing so for centuries. As applied to the treehouse, a couple of rooms inside were nearly as large as auditoriums, and would end up being nice places to hold concerts and plays and wedding receptions on occasion.

The rebuilding had taken place during a time when many sorcerer-led raids were going on at Netherwind, with the sorcerers and their cronies hoping to find things like magical weapons, banned artwork and books, secret military facilities, and magicians in hiding. Because the gnomes and bigfoots didn't want the treehouse to draw attention, they enlisted the aid of a local genie to apply a magical camouflage that made the treehouse look exactly as it had before, which basically rendered the additions completely invisible, unless someone was wearing rose-colored glasses produced by bagicals (magical bags) that would allow the wearer to see invisible and camouflaged things.

The gnomes and bigfoots only hit one major snag when finishing the rebuilding, when a herd of boggy weevils ate all of the parquet flooring off of the second and third levels of the treehouse all in one night. While it hadn't taken the gnome carpenters very long to lay the flooring, just two afternoons in fact, they were wary of performing a repeat in case the weevils were still in the area, which they were, by the way. Blessedly, the same genie who put the camouflage spell on the treehouse also knew how to put a spell on the flooring to make it smell and taste like pineberries, which boggy weevils absolutely hate. Thus, the problem was solved and the treehouse floors, redone in parquet, smelled very nice and fruity.

In addition to hosting the occasional concert or play or wedding reception, and just being a fun place for kids to play in and for adults to lounge in while reading a good book, the new treehouse would serve a variety of other functions, one of these being to host the Genie Bazaar, a week-long event like a large market, or souk, held in many special venues around the world twice a year, generally in April and November.

To the bazaar, which had absolutely masses of genie-made items, people would bring things to barter with. As a rule, nothing at the Genie Bazaar was ever sold, only bartered for; and the genie vendors would mainly only accept useful and simple things. Therefore, fancy or ornate items were seldom brought to the bazaar, the few exceptions being art pieces that puck trolls brought for trading purposes. Since this was a good means of distributing their artwork, which pucks loved to do (especially by gifting), it little mattered to them to receive a doormat in exchange for a painting, or two potholders for a glass vase, or a throw pillow for a bronze sculpture.

Humans attending the bazaar donned special genie-made vests that magically shrunk them down to genie size—around six inches, give or take—which was approximately puck size too. Once shrunk, on the ground level underneath the treehouse, the visitors rode in a special elevator to the Greeting Area on the first floor.

Larger magical vests were available for larger visitors like gryphons who loved to come to the bazaar in search of special books, which genie bookwrights were famous for making, including a lot of rare classics, but also many new novels that were sometimes difficult to get due to the outlawing of many books around the world.

Children coming to the bazaar with their parents for the first time were required to attend a brief orientation in the Greeting Area. And at the November bazaar four years after the treehouse was remade, we find three children all age seven named Reynaldo, June, and Allyson sitting on a plush green rug and listening to a girl genie named Persica.

“Only grown-ups can go onto the seventh floor,” Persica explained.

“What’s on the seventh floor?” June wanted to know.

“I don’t know,” Persica answered. “I’m not all grown up yet.”

Indeed, she very much looked like a younger genie, perhaps only in her late teens (except that she was nearly a hundred years old).

“And no running,” came the next rule, “except on the third floor because it was made for running, and eating. But you can eat anywhere, as long as your parents approve of what you’re eating.”

Persica also went on to explain that Guide Genies wearing purple pullovers and pantaloons were on every floor of the market to help get lost people unlost, and to lead shoppers to particular areas like where to find candles or birdbaths or sweaters or roller skates or whatever.

Before letting the kids join their parents, who were having coffee and visiting with one another while waiting for their children to finish orientation, Persica told June, Reynaldo, and Allyson a story about a child named Simon who had nothing with which to barter.

“If people don’t have anything to trade, they can barter wishes,” she said. “And the wishes don’t have to be said aloud because genies can hear wishes, even when they are not spoken.”

Now this all sounded very strange to the three, as to how a wish could be traded for something concrete, especially because people

could wish for all sorts of things. And so, Persica did her best to explain.

“The wishes have to be of the right kind for genies to want to take them in trade for something. They have to be wishes for others, not for ourselves; and they need to be wishes that genies would want to grant. However, genies don’t often want to grant wishes because people tend to wish for the wrong things.”

Since the three listeners all had things in their pockets that they intended to use for barter, they didn’t particularly think the wish issue applied to them. But they listened carefully nonetheless, because this was the polite thing to do.

Evidently, the boy Simon, who was exactly seven years old, didn’t know how to wish for the right things. He first wished for his mom to have a new dress because, if she had one, she’d likely take him to the amusement park. Next, Simon wished for his dad to have a better job because, if his dad made more money, he’d buy more toys for him. Then he wished for his teacher to get a pay raise, or a free vacation, so she’d be in a better mood and assign less homework. After a full morning of not getting anything in trade for his various wishes, Simon finally hit on something he felt sure would be good and that a genie would accept as barter. He wished for his family to adopt a pet from the animal shelter that would be a better pet than the one the boy living next door to him had, which was a one-eyed cat, the other eye having been scratched out by a gremlin early on in the cat’s life. When this wish also wasn’t accepted, Simon was fairly at his wits’ end. But finally, nearing the end of the day, he did think of something really good; and a genie did accept the wish. So he was able to leave the bazaar with a game he wanted from a toy booth, a new pair of sneakers from a shoe vendor, and a bag of candy from a confectioner.

“He got three things for his wish,” Reynaldo said, very surprised. In fact, all three kids were, especially since they had understood from their parents that they each would likely only be

able to get two things from the bazaar for the items they had brought with them to trade.

“Can you guess what Simon wished for?” Persica asked.

At this time, none of the three could.

“Well, think about it while you shop and let me know at the end of the day if you come up with anything,” Persica said. “If you don’t have the answer by then, I’ll tell you, but not until you’re just getting ready to leave.”

Next, hopping up from the plush green rug, the kids met up with their parents to enter the bazaar, which was quite astounding as far as wares being offered; and the rows of booths seemed to go on for miles and miles. Again, they rode in a little genie elevator to get to the different levels.

On the fifth floor, while her mom was looking at kitchen wares, June tagged along with her father who was shopping for a hammer, which he ended up trading four sea shells for.

The genies would eventually make the shells into magical books, which needed to be disguised as shells to hide them from Torch Squads.

Directly across from the tool booth, a bigfoot was trading two jars of pomegranate preserves for a blanket. While quite a few of the items at the Genie Bazaar were magical, many were simply very well made, like the blanket that couldn’t perform any particular tricks, but would serve to keep the bigfoot, who was from Illinois, warm and toasty in winter.

Another bigfoot down the way was trading a box of chalk for two pizza pans, after which, he swapped an eagle feather for a comb that could untangle even the messiest of tangled hair.

It was somewhat funny to see bigfoots walking around the same size as puck trolls and genies. A few gnomes were attending the bazaar. They hadn’t needed to be sized down, but were also funny to see since they were so large in comparison to everyone, some by more than twice as tall.

A super-small visitor went totally unseen by most at the bazaar, this being a girl spreepsprite who was picking out a tiny pair of shoes and a fan (from separate booths) that she ended up trading little bags of thistle seeds for. In truth, because she was so small and fast, only the genies that she was bartering with had noticed her.

June and her father next visited a couple of snack booths that were giving out samples.

From the one offering Fizzy Popcorn in Fifty Flavors, they chose to taste raspberry first, then dark chocolate.

At another table, after sampling bites of Vanilla Crème Toffee that tasted absolutely heavenly, June's dad traded a writing pen for a box of toffee.

The genies would make a blow-pipe out of the pen, for use as a secret weapon by members of the Underground Army.

Directly across from the toffee table, a puck troll was trading a lovely piece of pottery for a set of hand towels; and at a booth right next to that, a young man was trading a handful of river stones for a magical set of tableware that could lay itself.

June and her dad next met back up with June's mom who had traded a potholder she had knitted for a colander, and who declined any sampling of snacks at this time, though several were being offered by nearby vendors including Cinnamon Spiced Pickles and Wavy-Cravy Toast Chips. In fact, the whole family needed to save room for the picnic buffet luncheon taking place on the third floor at noon, so June and her dad also politely declined tasting these goodies.

Meanwhile, on the eighth floor with his parents, Reynaldo was watching a tamed orc who was looking at baskets. Upon choosing one, the orc traded bits of broken glass for the basket made of white oak splits.

The genies would end up tumbling the glass bits, then multiplying them for use as smooth gravel to line garden walkways.

The basket the orc had chosen was magical in that it had the ability to multiply fruits and vegetables put into it by double, making

the produce extend much further, especially in lean years, one of which was set to happen in the near future when drought would hit the mothership community in Iowa that the orc was a member of.

Reynaldo had already seen a lot of things he wanted, but was trying to be careful about choosing. Having trouble deciding between a hat and a t-shirt, he almost couldn't believe it when the clothing vendor told him that the shirt came with any hat of his choosing. Also, the five buttons Reynaldo had in the left back pocket of his jeans were the exact right items to be traded for the shirt-hat combo.

While the hat and shirt weren't magical, they were reversible, which basically meant he got two of each as far as their looks. They would also wear well for a very long time, as all genie garments do, so Reynaldo's baby brother (who on this day was at home being watched by his aunt) could use them later on.

After multiplying the five traded buttons into the thousands, the genies would make several hundred of them into water-purifying buttons for use by travelers in the wilderness, this being very helpful, especially since the buttons took up virtually no room at all in travel packs.

Thrilled with the hat and shirt, Reynaldo was already thinking about what he might want to trade for the six turkey feathers he still had in his shirt pocket. He would wait until after lunch to decide.

On the second floor of the treehouse, Allyson's mother had traded a handful of sewing pins for a set of magical curtains that would adjust by the days and seasons to shut out the harsh sunlight and heat from west-facing windows (like the ones in her family's dining area), while letting in just the right amount of softer and cooler light to see by.

Allyson was able to get two books for the eight twigs she had in her skirt pockets. Actually, seven would have done the trick, but she ended up donating the extra twig, after which, the smiling book genie gave her a lollypop by way of trade. One of the books was a mystery novel, and the other was a magical storybook whose words

were capable of floating out of the book to hang in the air so that she could read while simply lying on her bed, or on the couch, and just looking up at the ceiling.

Six of the traded twigs would be made into Fire Twigs for travelers to use in the woods, to help them start campfires, while the other two would simply be donated to a bird for use when building a nest in the spring.

The picnic buffet luncheon at noon was free for everyone and fun for all, being set up in one end of the large third floor that was the designated rough-and-tumble play area of the treehouse, where kids could run, wrestle, skip rope, skate, hopscotch, or whatever else might come to mind during play times. With the November breezes being mild, the shutters of the third floor were flung wide open to lend both fresh air and ample light to the merry gathering.

The unique food creations of the genie chefs were completely wonderful, particularly the triple-hole bagels stuffed with cheesy pastry puffs. The floating ice-cream floats and taffy crunch cookies were also favorites. Many of the healthier creations were just as tasty at the goodies including beet-flavored pasta balls, okra honey oat bars, asparagus mousse, and raspberry risotto.

Again shopping after lunch, Allyson bartered a ball of string for a special nightlight that she would give as a gift to her cousin who was prone to having bad dreams, but whose nightmares would be soothed by the magical light of the nightlight.

While he had been eyeing a game that he wanted, Reynaldo ended up trading his six turkey feathers for a picture frame to give to his aunt for her upcoming birthday.

June ended up trading the two small candles she had been carrying in her pocket for a pair of fuzzy knit slippers for her grandmother, to help keep her feet warm on the cold tile floor of her cabin.

All three families were finished shopping by mid-afternoon.

Meeting up with Persica near the exit in the Greeting Area, June was the one who had the answer as to what the boy Simon had wished for: “For the one-eyed cat to have his other eye back.”

“That is correct,” Persica answered. “And the genie that accepted the wish on that day granted it right away.”

All of the visitors to the bazaar got to keep the satchels they had been given for carrying around while shopping. The lovely cloth bags would be useful for all sorts of things over the years—for going to the market, carrying schoolbooks, toting laundry, taking to the beach, etc. But for right now, the satchels containing the bartered-for items needed to be magically sized up to match the bazaar visitors who were removing their special vests and returning to their normal sizes in a patio area under the treehouse.

Getting in line to place her satchel into the special genies’ size-up box that looked like a large sea trunk, June noticed a tall man climbing the ground-floor treehouse rope ladder. Since he hadn’t donned a vest, she reasoned that he probably wasn’t there to visit the bazaar. This was correct, as the man was at the treehouse to access the seventh floor.

While waiting for her husband outside, the wife of the tall man was sitting on a bench near the patio area. Wearing rose-colored glasses, she was admiring the construction of the treehouse, especially the seven magical support pillars that were not only invisible to the naked eye, but were composed of a type of energy that could be passed through, this being necessary so that various creatures wouldn’t run into them. Although largely translucent, the pillars each held faint colors of gold, silver, and bronze. The pillars were also inscribed near the bottom, each with a different single word as follows: Truth, Knowledge, Understanding, Honor, Justice, Prudence, and Righteousness.

Oh, they represent the Seven Pillars of Wisdom from the bible, the woman thought. At least, many people agreed that these seven were what was being referred to in Proverbs.

The seventh floor of the treehouse contained many magical objects, two of which the tall man, who was a philosopher as well as a biblical scholar, was visiting on this day.

The first was a mirror that displayed occasions in the past when God has saved us from harm, including many types of harm such as accidents, the malice of others, and even from our own poor judgment, weaknesses, and impulsiveness. For many people looking into the mirror, the saves amounted to so many times (like hundreds upon hundreds) that all of the instances could not be viewed in a single sitting.

The second object was a Time Glass (shaped like a giant hourglass and filled with magical sands) that allowed each person gazing at it to see the time they had, in their lives so far, invested in God, in developing a relationship with Him through prayer, through the study of His word, by listening to Him and following His directions, and by putting time into witnessing and helping others with an earnest heart, instead of engaging in selfish pursuits. In the case of the Time Glass, the swirling sands moved upwards from bottom to top, which meant that more sand should be in the top than in the bottom.

We don't know what the tall man saw in either the mirror or when gazing at the Time Glass, since these are, after all, private matters for individuals. However, upon rejoining his wife outside an hour later, the philosopher certainly had a lot to think about.

Upon digging into their satchels as soon as they got home, Reynaldo, June, and Allyson were all very surprised to each find an extra item inside. Reynaldo's bag contained the game he had been eyeing before choosing the frame for his aunt. June discovered a bracelet she had been admiring but had decided against in opting instead for the socks for her grandmother. And Allyson found a puzzle she had wanted, but hadn't gotten because she picked out the nightlight for her cousin instead.

The extras came about because, as the three had been wandering around the bazaar, they had all sort of been thinking of what they

might have wished for if they hadn't had things to barter with. June had thought it might be good to wish for the broken arm of an elderly neighbor man back home to heal up very quickly. Reynaldo had offhandedly wished for demons to stop attacking the mothership community he lived in. And Allyson had both wished and hoped for her pastor, who had recently lost his wife, to find comfort and peace.

One of the roving Guide Genies had heard all of these wishes, and had observed what items the kids were most interested in, but hadn't selected. Deciding that all of the wishes were good ones, the genie decided to grant them, as well as accept them as barter at the bazaar, so that each of the three would get something for the wishes they had thought of, but hadn't officially made.

It is sometimes our thoughts that matter most, this being a thought of the tall philosopher as he was reflecting on his time spent on the seventh floor of Netherwind's Treehouse.

“Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars.”
Proverbs 9:1

The Gargoyle Who Hid the Moon

A gargoyle named Anei residing on top of a church in the Southern part of the United States was reading an article in a newspaper sitting in a stack of papers at a newsstand in Paris, France. He didn't need to leave his normal spot atop the church to do this because he could see things all over the world simply in the eye of his mind, which is how many gargoyles choose to travel. Rather than moving around, they simply let the eye of their mind rove the earth. Anei was much dismayed at newspapers around the globe these days, which were full of lies. Instead of simply reporting news, they gave commentaries full of criticism and hatred. They were also suppressing truth in order to promote certain political and ideological agendas. Knowing many languages and having the ability to read lips, Anei was also able to watch many television news broadcasts around the globe, which were much the same as the papers as far as content and tone.

Since the various reports were simply a reflection of the real world, even when deciding to take a break from reading and watching the news, it's not like Anei could truly get away from the troubling events taking place all over the world such as ongoing wars, economic collapse, rapes, murders, mass shootings, suicides (the numbers skyrocketing), gang activities, arson, violent protests, and so forth. Evil, it seemed, was running rampant. People were angry and lashing out, both verbally and physically. Some were even setting trees on fire with their protesting and rioting.

Considering the newspaper, basically made of wood, Anei almost had to chuckle because the trees of the earth had for centuries been trying to communicate with people, to warn them about various dangerous paths they were on. Having tremendous foresight, many trees were not only able to recognize the overall evil tendencies of

fallen man and what these were leading to, but they were able to know about specific things that were about to happen, such as drunk driving accidents, attacks on individuals, plots by corrupt government officials, certain thefts, etc. When the actual events occurred, being observers, many trees then tried to report them. However, people don't often listen to the voices of trees, which is sad because we can learn a lot from these beautiful and useful creations.

In truth, people who studied trees felt there was a lot we could learn from them, such as how they embrace their struggles against the wind because they know it makes them stronger. In fact, wise horticulturists were constantly warning people to be careful about staking trees because there's often no need to and it can make them weak, even to the point of crippling them. Little trees most often don't need staking, only larger transplanted ones, and then, only briefly.

So too were trees great friends to a variety of wildlife, providing homes, shade, food, and such, all while getting along well with these creatures, cohabitating and never complaining.

Anei had recently read a report in a journal of a study done by tree experts on a group of live oaks growing on a hillside. The experiment, which took place during a long drought period, was able to prove that the trees don't compete for water and nutrients through their root systems; instead, they share. Those conducting the study watered trees only at the bottom of the hill using a blue dye in the water, and the water given was only of a limited amount. Within two days, the trees at the top of the hill, nearly a quarter of a mile from the watered ones, showed the blue tinge of the dye in their leaves. This proved that the trees had shared, instead of the ones at the bottom simply sucking up all the water for themselves, which they might have done, given the extreme nature of the drought. However, we should take note that the trees were not forced to share. They did so willingly.

It was Anei's opinion that many trees were very smart, so even if folks weren't going to listen to them, people should at least take some note of their ways.

In addition to not listening to the trees, people weren't listening to one another, but were instead actually doing a lot of screaming at others. At certain community meetings to discuss important issues, groups of people were showing up specifically to chant and scream, in order to drown out the opinions of anyone who didn't agree with them.

People can't hear each other when they're yelling at each other, Anei thought. Many of them were also buying into what news sources were telling them. *And they can't make wise decisions if they believe a bunch of lies being fed to them,* he decided.

Sadly, the bullying didn't stop with just meetings being shut down because many of the same chanters and screamers were following people in mobs to harass them at their homes, at grocery stores, in restaurants, etc. From Anei's observation, many of these bullies didn't have jobs and simply had too much time on their hands. Plus, they hadn't been taught any proper respect for others.

Even in places known for freedom, many liberties were being suppressed, including the freedom of speech and the freedom of religion. Being a wholly godly magical creature, Anei found it very distressing that Christians were specifically being targeted, not just by way of denying them free speech with regard to their beliefs, but also in the form of an onslaught of judicial injustices being committed against them all over the world. Many Christians were being driven out of business. Others were locked up for speaking the truth of God's Word, and for calling out evil in various forms. In England, it had become a hate crime to criticize a certain religious group, even when extremist members of that group were committing horrible crimes in the name of their religion.

Well, Anei thought, *if the non-violent members of that religion aren't going to say anything about their own people committing all sorts of atrocities, someone has to say something.*

It seemed it was mainly left to Christians to do this, and they were paying a price for speaking the truth.

Alas, as in many other cases, people weren't listening; nor did they seem to be taking notice of the growing hatred and violence being directed at God's children. With Satan's hold growing on them, many people had emotionally distanced themselves from others in various ways in order to excuse their rude and uncaring behavior. Some were even justifying and promoting the bullying to include physical attacks, as well as mental.

People right now not only can't hear, Anei thought, they can't think properly. If they won't listen, and aren't thinking right, what can be done? he wondered.

Somehow, someone needs to get their attention, his brain answered.

After a bit more pondering, his mind told him, *Their ears might not be working, and their brains are rather dull, but their eyes are still functioning.* And he had to consider that this might be an excellent way to get folks' attention, through their eyes, with something they could see.

So, how to make them see...he mused...see something really big. Or...rather...not see. Anei thought this much more sensible.

The moon was just rising for the evening, and this had given him a rather wonderful idea. A lunar event known as a Strawberry Moon (basically a fancy version of a full moon) was coming up, and many watchers of the heavens were looking forward to seeing it. He would hide the moon.

That will certainly get people's attention, he thought. And so, he started to make his plans right away.

Hiding the moon was not going to be a problem for him. Like all gargoyles, Anei had command over rocks and earth, simply commanding them with his mind through great mental strength. And so, he would raise giant masses of both rocks and earth to block people's view of the moon. To equal the huge quantities needed, he would take a little from here and a little from there over the planet,

so that people wouldn't notice the appearance of some vast new crater. It wasn't going to be a problem to keep the rocks and earth suspended for a fairly long stretch of time (long enough for humans to for sure take notice) because Anei had excellent powers of concentration. Plus, his mental energy had always been very strong.

However, in thinking everything through, Anei soon realized that he was going to need some help. For one thing, people looking through telescopes were going to be able to see the massive cloud he was raising. And although he was planning to make it high enough into the heavens so that planes wouldn't run into it, there was the issue of satellites to consider.

As far as whom to ask for help, Anei ended up contacting a genie named Este who put a spell on the giant floating cloud of rocks and earth to make it invisible, so that it couldn't be seen by telescopes. The spell also made the cloud block the vision of the moon only, and not the stars, so that space ended up pretty much looking like it was supposed to, minus the moon, of course. Este was also able to place a scoot field on the outer edges of the massive rock-and-earth cloud to make satellites go around it. Side blockers (curved extenders) hid the view of the moon from the eyes aboard the International Space Station.

The hiding of the moon had the effect Anei intended, as all people, everywhere, even those in space, thought the moon had disappeared. Then, the wondering and debate began.

Before carrying out his plan, Anei had considered that people might panic; but he didn't think it would be to the extent that anyone would go terror-crazy enough to push any nuclear buttons. (He was correct; no one pushed any of those kinds of buttons.)

People were still getting light at night from the stars, so the earth wasn't pitched into complete darkness. However, it was definitely much darker than normal, especially for a Strawberry Moon, which had just achieved its fullest state when Anei pulled his trick.

When first raising the cloud, he found himself thinking of John 3:19. "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the

world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Anei definitely felt the moon failing to give its light was very symbolic of these evil times. And even if he couldn't stop the evil (especially since much of it was happening as part of God's Overall Plan, which no one can stop), at least he could get people's attention, and possibly make them stop and think.

Some people did panic, particularly in thinking the missing moon to be a sign of the Endtimes. Since a darkened moon, along with the sun and stars failing to give their light, was mentioned several times in the bible as a sign of the End, many even thought that mankind might be on the very brink of the final events. However, reason quickly overtook any hysteria, mainly because the sun and stars were still giving light, and because tides on the earth seemed perfectly normal, which meant that the moon must still be there, but was just hidden for some reason. Being outside of an eclipse season, the phenomenon couldn't be due to an eclipse. Plus, the moon was always still slightly visible during an eclipse. And so, many people considered this to be a sign from God, like maybe He was warning us in preparation for bible prophecy coming true.

Many theologians, of course, said this was not the End, especially since the church (the current body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ) had not yet been raptured. Although a lot of prophecy in the bible was confusing and mysterious, Anei felt he had interpreted God's Word correctly with regard to the rapture—that it would definitely happen before the Great Tribulation.

And so, people realized it was not the End. However, many did start thinking that Jesus could come again at any time, which He can, and will.

“He will come ‘like a thief in the night,’” Este mentioned to Anei, quoting Jesus Himself.

Anei was nodding as he answered, “So people must be prepared, and awake, spiritually awake and watching.”

“And listening,” Este said.

“If only they *would* listen,” Anei replied. He was truly hopeful that many would start to, and soon, since we can never know how much time we will have until the End.

Blessedly, people did start to listen, and not only that, many started reading the bible. And they started listening to God, Who is very much speaking to the inhabitants of the earth today in many varied and wondrous ways.

““He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”” John 8:47

Poetry from the Diaries



The Great Horned Owl

At the one sitting in the oak tree nook,
Let us have a full top-to-bottom look.
According to legend, his tufty ears
Listen well to wisdom beyond his years.
His big yellow eyes search the fields and skies,
Both after sunset and before sunrise.
With a curved and strong and razor-sharp beak,
The owl with his mouth can much havoc wreak.
His extra-wide wings have absolute stealth,
A gift treasured more than great piles of wealth.
The owl's middle is both fluffy and stout
With a camouflage pattern round about.
Long talons adorn his large feathered feet,
Designed to catch meals and snacks for a treat.
Now we have a small snapshot, head to toe;
But is this creature friend, or is he foe?
He might eat poisonous snakes, skunks, and mice
To keep our yards tidy and safe and nice,
But he's a threat to others small in size
Since his presence often means their demise.
This includes the neighbor's new tabby cat,
Having a chat with a wren, nice and fat,
Who thought the owl was just part of the tree,
But then was, sadly, no longer to be.

Under Heaven's Ever-Watchful Blue Eyes

Grey boulders greeted me as a dear friend,
Overlooking the vast deep canyon bend.
Daring the steep path down slowly I went,
Letting switchbacks safely guide my descent.
Often I did pause to take in the views,
Varied by more than just breathtaking hues.
Eagles I spied in the skies far above,
Soaring alongside a most wondrous Dove.
Yearning, my heart joined them in the wide skies,
On the wings of the One Who satisfies,
Under Heaven's Ever-Watchful Blue Eyes.

A Midnight Walk

Jonquils in neat rows gaze at star-filled skies,
Enjoying the sight of purple cloud strings
Sailing smoothly past a tawny owl's eyes
Until meeting a flurry of bat wings
Slicing pieces of sky like pie wedges.
Savoring the soft breath of a Chinook
Answering the distant chimes of a clock,
Voices of foxes bark from high ledges,
Echoing songs of frogs in stream and brook.
Such are the delights of a midnight walk.

The Birds' Invitation

Birds are showy and lyrical, with feathers painted bright,
And songs as full of wonder as the mystery of night.
Among natural creations, they seem to be the Star.
But they also seem to be saying, "Just come as you are.
I'll sing to you for hours, I think you are pretty too,
As pretty as the flowers and as shiny as the dew."

So how might we respond, since we know we can't match their height?
"Just do nothing and relax," the birds say, "enjoy the sight,
And the beautiful music, why not try to sing along?"
"Because most of us wouldn't dare drown out the lovely song,
From the amazing choir we've grown to admire,
Oft more exquisite than expertly wielded flute and lyre."

"Okay, then just sit back and enjoy the musical show,
Playing sunny days, cloudy, rainy, even in the snow.
We're pleased to perform winter, summer, fall, or spring.
Whatever the weather, we just love to twitter and sing.
To preen and fly and nest we birds do also truly love,
These skills given to us from the Heavenly One above."

"Even if you can't match our songs, or flight or showiness,
We know you have your own gifts, ones that do often impress,
Like building us strong houses, filling baths, and pots with seed.
Of your many services, we frequently have great need.
Like with birds, God knew what He was doing when He made you,
A treasure on this earth, but for much more than you can do."

Slowing Down

I was moving too fast it seemed,
Or so others of my kind deemed.
“But I must head to the Tall Gate;
I surely don’t want to be late.”
“Someone Else keeps the countdown clock
Whether in life we run or walk.”
This I was most certainly told
By those young, medium, and old.
While I understood the advice,
My old habits did not make nice.
There’s always so much to be done—
Work, sleep, eating, and having fun.
To hurry these things still felt right,
Morning, noon, and also at night.
But something surely felt amiss,
Like an ungranted secret wish.
Thus, my brain raised an inner doubt.
What in my living was left out?
Perhaps time to truly enjoy
The results from my rushed employ.
And so I did slow myself down.
And the result did most astound.
I savored taking time to cook,
Also reading a treasured book.
The bible can’t be read at speed
To obtain from it what we need:
There’s really no need to hurry,
And also no need to worry.
God holds the countdown in His hand.
All will run in sync with His Plan.
We need only open the gift

(The one to heal the giant rift)
To have access to what's above
And be sheltered by His vast love.

Early Springtime

Gables draped in spider silk tower
Over the snow-splotched fields in wait;
Dogwoods gaze upon a bellflower
In its not-yet-budding-out state;
Such are the earliest sights of spring.
Across the rolling countryside,
Willow tendrils wave a soft warning—
Each breath of winter now must hide.
So many beauties soon to behold
On every springtime day anew;
Mosses of green, buttercups of gold,
Enjoy the warmth and morning dew.

The Myth of Genie Lamps

Genies seldom live inside of lanterns or lamps,
Instead choosing something more like a cracker tin,
Mailbox, soup pot, carriage clock, tool chest, or fruit bin,
Or in a pocket in an album filled with stamps.

We might also find one in an old cigar box,
Matchstick holder, tall vase, butter churn, gravy boat,
Pepper mill, tissue case, pocket of a warm coat,
Or a sturdy sea trunk with two hefty brass locks.

A perfume bottle, sand bucket, upside-down bell,
Canister, urn, egg carton, empty pickle jar,
Glass sphere, sewing basket, trunk of a blue toy car,
Ribbon dispenser, or even a dry inkwell.

Genies live in houses too, much like you and me:
Cottage, bungalow, Tudor, cabin, ranch, houseboat,
Renovated barn, dugout, castle with a moat,
Condo, yurt, trailer, apartment, loft, or teepee.

To genies, lamps and lanterns are mainly for light,
Like candles, open curtains, campfires, and torches,
And outdoor fixtures like those on many porches.
Now we have the truth, a little genie insight.

The Magic of Flowers

Their many forms endowed with unspoken powers,
Flowers capture our senses, and thereby entrance.
As we gaze upon their beauty endless hours,
These heavenly creations no one need enhance,
With delicate colors and most breathtaking smells,
Hold all earthly creatures firmly under their spells.

However, whether tall or short, sparse or full-leaf,
In a forest, dry creek, rocky valley, or glade,
The life of a flower is incredibly brief.
Even though each is perfect exactly as made,
The perfection will always hold a hidden cost—
Soon to the world, each one will be forever lost.

Time is often short, very like a chance meeting,
And most things on this earth were never meant to last;
Even human lives are incredibly fleeting,
Like the last winter snow, or a breath from the past.
However, despite humans' earthly brevity,
We can bloom and learn to attain some levity.

Flowers through their many seeds each year can renew,
With vibrant greenery and petals most airy.
As sure as with each springtime comes the early dew,
They spring up to breeze-float like a dancing fairy.
Their breathing tantalizes and tickles our nose,
While their allure and softness embrace our bare toes.

Even as our own leaves and petals start to fade,
Let the seeds we plant be not for our own gleaning.
Instead fill the earth with colors many in shade,

As well as a beautiful fragrance called meaning.
As our blessings rain down like the springtime showers,
We can be very like the Magic of Flowers.

A Most Perfect Day

Soap animals made out of sudsy hair—
Impalas, hippos, a tall polar bear.
Making cookies and putting on lipstick,
Packing a hamper for a late picnic.
Lounging long amidst the deep garden moss,
In the skies, the clouds form a perfect cross,
Clearing weighted minds of all other things;
Instantly our hearts are given great wings,
To help us along our path without stray,
Yon sunset closes A Most Perfect Day.

Regarding Happenstance and Godforsaken

I dreamed I saw two men walking together one day,
On a wide city street under clouds of white and gray.
Crowds of people followed, their paces both fast and slow,
All carefree as to where the two might decide to go.
From a deserted side street, I briefly joined the throng,
Though I quickly realized that I didn't quite belong.
From someone beside me, I decided to inquire,
As to whom all the people were so prone to admire.
The answer came quickly in a voice unshaken,
"They are often called Happenstance and Godforsaken."
When the pair in the lead did abruptly disappear,
The startled gasps of the crowd resounded far and near.
With the deserted street I came from still within sight,
An about-face I did, under clouds of gray and white.
Of musing the strange vanishing, my mind desisted,
Because I knew the two never really existed.
My mind instead vowed to give Heaven more than a glance,
Knowing full well that truly nothing is Happenstance.
And from this odd dream, I did suddenly awaken,
Also knowing nothing is ever Godforsaken.

Prayer for Each New Day

Dear Lord,
Show us Your will each new day;
Please guide us along the way.
Help us stick to Your set plan,
Always follow Your command,
And be kind to fellow man.

Let us clearly hear Your voice;
We have great cause to rejoice
From the Gift You chose to give
So that Your children might live.

Keep us fixed on You in love,
In sight of the wondrous Dove,
Your Word, the Truth and the Light,
A shield of unending might,
All the day and all the night.

Show us the way each new day,
From Your path let us not stray.
Help us listen, help us love,
Keep our gaze on things above.

As we kneel daily to pray
Help us cast our cares away,
Give ourselves to Your full will;
Plan for each You will fulfill,
And greatest wisdom instill.

Give us courage to obey
No matter what comes our way.

Every instant, each season,
Help us trust in Your reason.

Please, let our hearts never sway;
Help us know what we should say.
We ask this for day and night:
Your protection, Your insight,
So all can be set to right.
Amen

Unique

If I were a jellybean, what flavor would I be?
Mint chocolate, apricot, popcorn, or perhaps green tea?
Or maybe a flavor no one has invented yet—
Nine-stalk ginger rhubarb, shrimp toast, or blue rose sherbet?
Each person is unique, interior and surface,
Of a different cloth cut, each with a separate purpose;
From a pattern designed by His loving hands and heart,
A wonderful creation, each of us set apart.
Kindled is the desire to be distinct from the throng;
Inside of us our souls each sing a much different song.
No two people are alike, as some might wish to claim,
Despite having a Father with the exact same name.

Simple Things

Genies oft make magical objects out of quite simple things
Such as clothespins, sugar spoons, pencils, and curly purple strings.
A matchbox and a diaper pin tend to ooze simplicity,
But with genie magic added, they have eccentricity.
For the clothespin can now hold the full weight of a hanging bus,
And the singing diaper pin can soothe a toddler's crying fuss.
A tin can provides a homeless man with a daily full meal,
And a banquet dinner is born from a small potato peel.
Diamonds and rubies and sapphires, the small matchbox can produce.
The curly purple string can be made to chase a running goose.
Of using fancier fare, a genie oft says, "What's the use?"

No, the simple things are much better than most intricacies
Such as vases, ornate paintings, ships designed to sail the seas.
Carved pewter candlesticks can't match the skill of the plain old gloves
That protect a traveler from a thug's fist attacks and shoves.
The magic from simplicity produces a better bet
Like the umbrella that showers donuts while shedding the wet.
And the spoon that stirs itself when put into tea or coffee
Can be a complement to the barrette that burps fudge toffee.
So when out looking for adventure, don't overlook a bean,
Zipper, feather, twig, button, peach pit, or an old magazine,
For these might hold genie magic capable of anything.

A Genie Calendar

In January, attend a square dance,
And wear red bellbottom pants.
In February, do some roof mending,
Plank bending, letter sending.
In March, polish red and blue gemstone rocks.
Then darn all polka-dot socks.
In April, play seven games of ping pong.
Then write a rock-n-roll song.
In May, pick up forty-eight crooked sticks,
And trim the long candlewicks.
In June, walk a mid-size alligator,
And clean refrigerator.
In July, make butter and can peaches.
Then visit black-sand beaches.
In August, take five hours to tie flies,
And go outside to fly ties.
In September, look at stars and stack boards.
Then take the time to carve gourds.
In October, sort the ribbons and bows,
And clean east-facing windows.
In November, read a mystery book,
Before fishing in a brook.
In December, sand the rails, read long tales.
Then at the mile track, race snails.

A Snail's Pace

A snail may be slow, but he has perfect timing,
Like a well-wound watch or a cuckoo clock chiming.
He doesn't pay attention to the word hurry,
Having long ago decided not to worry
About just how slow he might actually be,
When climbing to the top of the crabapple tree.

Being slow, he can help others along the way;
And he never wants them to provide any pay,
Like when moving a pebble for the ladybug,
Or helping a pill bug get unstuck from a rug.
Plus, he carries a load near heavy as a mouse.
How many creatures actually carry their house?

Also, going slow is what lets him leave the trail
Of glistening slime which, though small in scale,
Is often taken note of for its artistry
Of scrolling loops and squiggles, glorious to see.
In the snail's view, he shouldn't go any faster.
To be in a hurry could lead to disaster.

He might miss certain wonders, like those in the sky:
Cloud animals, falling stars, kites soaring on high.
After all, life should not be like running a race.
We should all of us strive to keep a steady pace,
In accordance with God's perfect timing and will,
His glorious plan for each that we must fulfill.

The Hobgoblin and the Puck Troll

A hobgoblin once decided to tail a puck,
Through fields, meadows, forests, even messy pond muck.
Using camouflage skills to look like simple rocks,
Pumpkins, buckets, a chair, a pair of woolen socks,
The hob imagined he was being so clever.
Seeing me follow, he thought, the puck will never.
When I manage to get close, then I will attack;
I'll jump right on top of his stupid little back.

But the puck troll wasn't stupid, nor unaware,
Being able to sense the hob from raised neck hair,
And from hearing loud breathing coming from the beast,
Particularly from the northwest and the east.
The puck wasn't worried, knowing he would prevail,
In outwitting this fearsome foe hot on his tail.
Plus, the puck had many friends all over the land,
Who would be sure to lend him a strong helpful hand.

In a corn field, the puck brought a scarecrow to life
Who slashed at the hobgoblin like a sharp straw knife.
In a park, a statue of a horse came awake,
To kick the hobgoblin into a nearby lake.
A sculpture of a beaver next entered the race;
He tail-slapped the nasty creature right in his face.
A topiary moose also entered the fray,
To stomp and pummel, sending the hob on his way.

Though most pucks are only around six inches tall,
The strength of their magic is anything but small.
In truth, they can move mountains, if they so desire,
Or get a fountain to put out a forest fire.

They can hide people inside woven tapestries,
To save them from varieties of unfriendlies.
Puck trolls are capable of many splendid things,
Like baking blue-ribbon cookies, and guarding kings.

To Fill the Soul

The soul is so huge, larger than any sky;
This is why nothing on earth can satisfy.
Not crates of fireworks or other flashy fun,
Like long sandy beaches sparkling in the sun,
Not getting a celebrity autograph,
Or enjoying a hot frothy bubble bath,
Not ice cream scoops between a split banana
With whipped cream enough to cover Montana.
In taking a trip to Paris, or the moon,
We find the fulfillment fading all too soon.
Even a pile of diamonds loses its shine,
So too the flavor of the best of all wine.
From experience we can surely surmise,
To Fill the Soul, only God is the right size.

A Typical Genie Menu for the Week

Monday

basted eggs and sautéed ham, sweet and sour onion jam
cherry and apple cream tarts, chocolate-filled raspberry hearts

Tuesday

twice-baked jumbo frankfurters, watermelon ice squirters
candied mint and basil leaves, seven-high glazed donut trees

Wednesday

sautéed mussels from the lake, cheddar cheese potato bake
double divinity squares, cinnamon-raisin baked pears

Thursday

quiche with carrots and peas, topped with lobster mac-n-cheese
marshmallow and popcorn pie, fluffed and frozen rainbow sigh

Friday

okra stuffed zucchini blooms, with a side of pickled ‘shrooms
orange and white chocolate mousse, freshly-squeezed pineapple juice

Saturday

cauliflower casserole, turkey on a Kaiser roll
triple-layer fudge nut cakes, dewberry and lemon shakes

Sunday

braided asparagus broil, drizzled with black truffle oil
salted caramel fountain, star-sprinkled sundae mountain

Mrs. Winterhill

Mrs. Winterhill, a woman of the Far North
Put on her knit hat and mittens to venture forth
Into the ice and snow, for it was a cold day.
“Yes, a bit nippy,” Mrs. Winterhill did say
To the friendly Arctic fox outside her front door,
Who was busy sweeping hoarfrost from the porch floor.

In this cold, some might not have wanted to get out;
But the puppy needed to be taken about,
To stretch his cooped-up legs and chase his wiggly tail.
Plus, Mrs. Winterhill needed to get her mail
From the postbox standing at the end of the lane,
Where letters were delivered in both snow and rain.

“No mail today,” Mrs. Winterhill did relate
To her dog and the snowy owl perched on her gate.
“Maybe tomorrow,” the owl did offer to her,
To which the woman replied, “Oh, for sure.
I’m expecting the socks that I ordered last week.
And a chew bone for the dog; he deserves a treat.”

The socks and the chew bone came the very next day.
With his mouth full of treat, “Yummy,” the dog did say.
Two other special things were in the parcel box,
Including a warm wool scarf for the Arctic fox.
And for the snowy owl, a monstrous bag of seed
Of which in colder weather, the owl had great need.

Concerning Genie Wishes...

Genies only grant wishes of the selfless kind,
The ones made for others, without ourselves in mind.
And to the myth of their being in servitude,
A genie might reply, "Well, that seems rather crude."
Their devoted service is only to the One,
Also known as the Truth and the Light and the Son.

So when we make wishes on our birthday candles,
Like for a parachute with ten fancy handles,
Or a toy train set, bicycle, puzzle, or book,
Or just a blanket for our favorite reading nook,
We might think if these are the right kind of desires
In a world full of murder, theft, and arson fires.

If our wishes are for others, and not for selves,
Hungry people might find food on their empty shelves.
And the homeless man might have a roof overhead,
Along with a warm, cozy, and comfortable bed.
Plus, the sick and weary might find a little hope
So their lives don't finish on the end of a rope.



“For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

—Isaiah 55:12

Clock Winders Chronology

Part I

Wind Horses and Horned Lions: June 2015 to May 2016

Burnished Doves and Sky Serpents: June 2016 to May 2017

Netherwind and Laurelstone: June 2017 to August 2017

The Clock of the Universe: December 2041 to May 2042

The Once and Forever Mountain: June 2065 to July 2066

Part II

The Protector of Dragons: August to September 2066

Time Key Travelers: August to December 2066

The Promise of the Snow Gryphon: January to August 2067

The Lost Genie Diaries: Diaries found August 2067

Spresprites and Soul Shadows: August to September 2067

The Bloodstone Miracles: October to December 2067

Noontime in the Peacock Garden: December 2067

Although the main events take place within the dates listed for each book (spanning 52½ years), we flashback and flashforward many times to have a look at both past and future happenings. While no one can ever know for sure when the events of the Endtimes will occur, the Clock Winders Series puts the Second Coming of Jesus at no sooner than one hundred and twelve years from the date of our first adventure, but probably not much longer than that. The series is designed so that Part II can be read before Part I, which might be preferable to younger readers as the latter adventures are somewhat shorter and quicker reads than the earlier ones.



Works by J.H. Sweet

The Fairy Chronicles
Clock Winders Series
The Wishbone Miracle
The White Sparrow
Juan Noel's Crystal Airship
The Heaviest Things
Foo and Friends
The Time Entity Trilogy
Cassie Kingston Mysteries
The Gypsy Fiddle

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