

## Saving the Queen

Nora and Nana were enjoying a lovely day at the beach. They had set up their blanket and umbrella and tiptoed toward the water. Nora quickly splashed and jumped with the waves; Nana followed a little more tentatively. They had only been in the water five minutes when Nora exclaimed, "Look Nana!"

Nana stopped and looked toward the beach. She couldn't believe her eyes. There on the beach, stood the 8 foot tall penguin named Mr. Twinkle. Nana couldn't remember how he got the name Mr. Twinkle. He never spoke when he showed up to carry them off on their adventures.

"We're not going!" Insisted Nana. "We just got here. We are going to have some fun first."

Nana turned her back on Mr. Twinkle. But a moment later, she turned around and there stood Mr. Twinkle, just two feet away, casting a shadow over them.

"No, Mr. Twinkle!" She said again.

But Nora giggled and said, "You know he's not going to let us stay here. So let's just go."

Nana and Nora exited the water, slid on their shorts and shirts, and climbed up Mr. Twinkle's back. They took their seats in their usual red chairs and strapped in. He bent his knees and jumped, propelling himself quickly up into the sky.

Mr. Twinkle had been taking them on adventures for three years now. They have become quite famous in the land of the clouds. They were well-known for their ability to find, rescue, or help as needed.

As they passed the many layers of clouds, they saw some of their old friends and waved. Soon, Mr. Twinkle turned left and entered a massive cloud. They flew over a small city and noticed the large sign that read, City of Lost Items.

"What a strange name." Murred Nora. Nana nodded her agreement.

They looked at the town as they flew over. There was a bicycle lying in the middle of the street. There were random shoes on porches, stray items of clothing, missing buttons, and random toys strewn around the town. While the town was not actually messy, it was definitely unusual.

As they flew further, they could see a large castle, in the distance. It was an exceptionally beautiful castle, sparkling in the sunlight. They landed midway between the town and the castle. Nora secretly hoped they were going to the castle and not the town.

Mr. Twinkle landed, bent down, and they slid off his back, as he immediately disappeared. They looked around to see who was there to greet them and it didn't take long to notice a man in a horse drawn carriage standing nearby. He hurried to them.

"You he must Nana and Nora. We have been waiting for you! The queen is missing! The king would like to see you right away." He spoke hurriedly.

They climbed into the carriage and were quickly whisked away. The castle was even more beautiful up

close. The outside glittered as if studded with diamonds. The front door was large and heavy and a beautiful plum color. The driver hurried ahead of them and opened the door.

The interior was as glorious as the exterior, but they didn't have time to look around before the king rushed in to greet them. They knew right away he was a king by his stately stature and the large crown he wore on his head. He shook their hands quickly and introduced himself.

"I am King Kassteel. My beautiful wife, Queen Marissa, took her usual walk yesterday morning and did not return. My guards have searched high and low for her. I summoned you to help find her."

"Did you search the nearby town?" Asked Nora.

"Oh yes." He replied. "The City of Lost Items was the first place we looked, since she's lost. But she was nowhere to be found. I am afraid something has happened to her." Nana looked at him. "Has anyone threatened her or do you have reason to believe something bad happened?"

"Oh no!" Exclaimed the king. "Everyone loves the queen. But it's not like her to disappear. She would never go this long without telling me where she was going."

A young woman appeared and spoke softly. "I will show you to your room."

The king nodded. "Please, go refresh yourselves and we will have dinner before you begin searching."

Nana and Nora follow the young lady to a huge room with two large four-poster beds and mirrors everywhere. It was the most beautiful room Nora had ever seen. Everything sparkled like glitter. Nana and Nora washed their faces and went down for dinner. After a quick bite to eat, they set out to find the queen.

The king had given them a driver and coach to take them wherever they wanted to go. They decided to walk first and follow the path the queen had taken for her morning walk. They found nothing suspicious.

Next, they made their way to the City of Lost Items. Just as they had noticed flying over, there was something odd about the town. The houses were tiny, in a variety of unusual colors, with large front doors and two round front windows. This made the houses look like faces staring at them and in most windows, they saw huge cats with large eyes staring out.

They questioned some people in the town, but no one had seen the queen. However, everyone did let them know how much they love the queen.

"Have you checked the barn?" asked a small child.

"The barn?" Nora questioned.

"Yes, that's where the lost people are." Answered the little girl.

Nana and Nora made their way to the barn and went inside. They were surprised to see so many people. There were people inside cleaning and playing cards. There were children out in the yard swinging, climbing trees, and chasing each other. They asked about the queen, but no one had seen her.

"Who are all these people?" Nora asked a man leaning against the fence.

"We are lost." Replied the gentleman. "No one has come to claim us yet."

"We are lost," replied the gentleman. "No one has come to claim us yet."

Nora and Nana climbed back into the carriage, both agreeing that it was a very odd experience and wondering why the lost people didn't find their own way home.

They continued their search through town, stepping over items as they went; a basketball here, a sock there, a street sign across the sidewalk, and many other random items. After they had spent several hours searching the town, Nora exclaimed. "Have you noticed, Nana, the little girl from the barn seems to be everywhere we go?"

"Yes." Nodded Nana.

The girl was spying on them, but trying not to act obvious. At the next house, as Nana questioned the homeowners about the queen, Nora crept to the back of the house. She peered around the corner and spotted the little girl playing with a cat in the driveway. The little girl looked up, saw her, and jumped up quickly.

"Are you following us?" asked Nora.

"No," replied the little girl, but she looked quickly down at her feet.

"I believe you are," remarked Nora. "What's going on?"

The little girl kept her eyes lowered and shook her head.

Nora frowned. "If you know something about the queen, please let us know. She's evidently a wonderful woman and people miss her."

"Oh yes, she is," stammered the girl. "She's a wonderful queen. She sometimes brings ice cream to the children at the barn. She also comes to read stories to us."

"Then, you surely want to help find her."

"I was just watching," said the little girl slowly, "to see if you found the tunnel."

"What tunnel?" Nora started to ask, but the girl had run quickly away.

Nora went to find Nana and told her about the tunnel.

Nana asked the coach driver. He shook his head and told them he had never heard of a tunnel, but confessed he wasn't from the town. They asked several other people, but no one else had heard of the tunnel. They made their way back to the barn to question the little girl, but she was nowhere to be found.

"Let's be logical," stated Nana. "If there's a tunnel, where would it be? Where would it go? The city faces the castle on one side, but is surrounded by a scary forest on the other sides. I don't think a tunnel would lead all the way to the castle. But, it surely wouldn't go out into the dark forest either."

They were about to give up on finding a tunnel, when they found an abandoned house at the edge of town. They searched the house for clues about the missing queen. They looked upstairs, downstairs, and in all the rooms. When they had finally given up, they sat down on the old sofa in the living room, feeling frustrated.

They decided to return to the king and let him know they had reached a dead end. When Nora stood, her toe caught on something under the edge of the rug. They flipped back the rug and were surprised to find a trap door. Excitedly, they pulled the rug and the table off the trap door and opened it, to reveal a staircase leading down into darkness.

Without hesitation, Nora pulled out her phone and turned on the flashlight and headed down the stairs.

"Are we crazy to be going down a dark and empty tunnel?" Asked Nana.

"Yes!" Replied Nora, and they continued.

After a very long walk, they finally came to another staircase. At the top of the stairs, they were surprised to find that the door opened easily. Nora peeked in. When she didn't see anyone, she pushed the door open and she and Nana climbed in.

They were standing in the middle of a small, empty room.

They crept to the door and peered in. They couldn't believe their eyes! This looked like a smaller version of the castle, an exact duplicate. The only difference seemed to be one large throne where there were two thrones in the other castle.

Then they saw her, the queen. She walked right into the room.

Nora looked at Nana and whispered. "What is going on? Why is the queen in a castle that looks exactly like her own?"

"I don't know." Answered Nana. "But we are going to find out."

They pushed the door open and walked into the larger room. The queen turned around quickly with her mouth agape.

"Who are you?" She demanded. "And what are you doing here?"

Nora stepped forward, putting her hands on her hips. "The question is what are you doing here? We have been looking everywhere for you. The king is very worried."

The queen suddenly smiled sweetly and spoke. "I should have let him know where I was going. I was just about to go back home."

"Good!" Said Nana. "Then we can get back to the beach!"

The queen gave them a quizzical look, then smiled. "Please have a seat. I'll be ready in just a few minutes to go with you."

"Do you have a bathroom we could use to freshen up?" Asked Nana.

"Of course." The queen responded. "Down the long hallway, the last door on the left."

They made their way down the hallway and entered the large bathroom.

"There's something very strange going on." Quipped Nora. "Something just isn't right."

"I agree." Said Nana. "But I don't know what it is."

Then, they heard a noise. They listened and heard it again. It was a tiny voice in the distance making.

what sounded like, a humming sound, almost like someone crying. They tiptoed down the hallway opening doors and looking in as they went.

When they opened one door, there was a woman, tied to a chair, who looked exactly like the queen. She had a cloth tied around her mouth.

Nora hurried to her and unwrapped her mouth.

"Who are you?" Asked Nora.

"I'm the queen." She cried. "Would you please untie me?"

"But you can't be the queen." insisted Nora. "We just talked to the queen."

"You talked to my sister." Replied the woman. "She has always hated me. She kidnapped me yesterday and is trying to take my place. She's been practicing being me and will try to trick the king into believing that she is me. I need to get home."

Nora had just finished untying the woman when they heard a noise. They turned to find the other queen behind them.

Nora put her hands on her hips and said, "now tell me which one of you was really the queen?!"

"I am the queen!" They said together.

"That didn't help." Exclaimed Nora. "We will take you both to the king and he will tell us which is the real queen."

"Yes!" Said the queen in the chair.

"No!" Said the other at the same time.

"You must not be the queen, since you don't want to see the king." Stated Nana.

"Of course I want to see the King. But, this sister of mine will lie and confuse him. So, I must be the only one to return home."

"We are taking you both." Nana said sternly.

Nora opened the heavy front door, but all they could see as far as they could see, was gnarled and evil looking trees blocking all paths.

"We can't go this way." said Nana. "Back to the tunnel." Nora ordered. "we must go through the tunnel."

Back down the tunnel they went, Nora, Nana, and the two queens. When they reached the end of the tunnel, the first queen went up. When she got to the top, she tried to slam the trap door closed, but Nora was too fast and climbed out with her.

They ran out of the house in time to see the queen driving away in the carriage with the driver.

"Oh no!" Cried the real queen. "She is on her way to the castle and no telling what she will do."

They looked around and quickly found a gentleman who would drive them in his small carriage to the castle. He was very excited to be driving the queen. They told him to drive very quickly, and he did.

They pulled up to the castle and saw the other carriage was empty. They rushed inside to find the king hugging the other queen.

"Thank you so much for finding her." He said to Nora and Nana, glancing at them.

"That's is not the queen!" Nora insisted.

The fake queen laughed. "I'm not sure why you sent them to find me. I found my way back without them." The real queen stepped forward and the king stopped smiling and stepped back.

"What is going on here?" He asked. "Who is that?"

"It's me darling, your queen. She said and stepped toward him.

He looked from one queen to the other. They looked identical.

"Oh no." he said. "I can't believe it. This is your evil twin sister you've told me about? How do I know which of you is which?"

"Of course you know me darling." Said the queen standing next to him. "No, he doesn't." Said the other queen. "He knows me."

Nora interrupted. "This should be a very easy test. You are her husband. You should be able to determine who your queen is with a simple question or two."

"Of course." He said excitedly. "This will be easy. What is your favorite jewel? He asked.

"Emerald!" They both responded at the same time.

He shook his head. "What is your favorite food?" He asked next.

"Blueberry pie!" They exclaimed in unison.

Nora cleared her throat. "They are sisters." She reminded him. "I think you're going to have to ask something a little harder than that.

"The king nodded. "What is the name of your favorite horse?"

"Rosebud." Answered the real queen.

"Yes, Rosebud." Replied the other one quickly. But it was too late. The king knew who his queen was and went to hold her hand.

"Now." He said. "What should we do with your sister?"

The sister looked at the floor.

"I think it's time we moved her into the castle with us and teach her to be a kind and loving sister of the queen. The townspeople will love her. She has not always been evil. I think we can find that loving person, again."

So, that's exactly what they did. They were making plans as Nora and Nana climbed up the back of Mr. Twinkle and happily headed back to the beach.