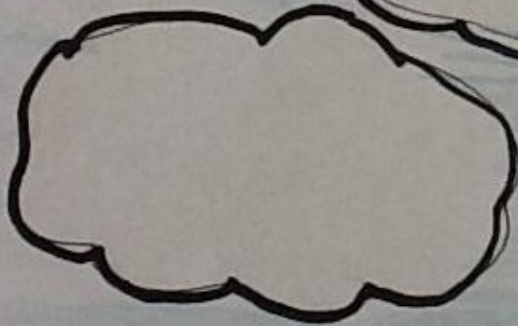


# Above the Well

By: Raiia



# ABOVE THE WELL

BY RAIA

## CHAPTER 1: THE CAVE

“No, No! Please, don't!” I cried, as the unmerciful guard brought the whip down again. “Ow!! How could I know? It was eating my shoe, that dirty beast!”

“She wasn't a dirty beast!” the guard thundered. “That was my pet pig, Snookie Putsie, and you turned her into stew!”

“Sorry! Now may I go?” I inquired softly, stifling a yelp.

“Go now, and get out of my eyesight!” was his reply.

As I scampered away to my stone pallet, I tripped and went tumbling, only to crash my knee on a rock. “If only I had decided to abandon my dragon at the lake, then I wouldn't have been arrested. I also wouldn't have ended up in the same prison as before near the well I dove into so long ago. Of course, that was before I solved the night goblin problem,” I thought to myself.

I got up and leaned back against the cold wall. I used the wall for support while I slowly inched along with my back to it. All of a sudden my elbow got stuck in a hole in a large stone on the wall. When I pulled my elbow out of the crevice, I noticed that the hole was at the center of a stone. After I got my elbow out, I put my eye to the hole and saw that behind the stone was a pathway that led sloping downward.

I wanted to go down that tunnel for it looked like I might have a way to escape, so I looked around for an entryway. Finding none, I leaned against the stone with all my puny weight. Surprisingly, the stone gave way, and I saw it wasn't a stone at all. It was a piece of gray cardboard made to look like a stone and was glued to the other stones surrounding it. I climbed into the small opening and carefully pulled the cardboard back into place to hide myself from view. I settled into a comfortable position and feeling tired, was soon asleep.

I dreamed that I was underground and was with the night goblins again. Motley was saying, “Meep ala mo un cha cha lo mu si al ga. Un poco moco a la too.” The translation was, “Go look for a castle that appears for only one hour of one day of the year. This is to recover the king's lost gold, stolen by some spirits. The king needs his gold back because a part of the castle is coming apart and he needs more money to fix it. You may have a dragon of your own to accompany you.”

I replied, in Spooft, “How do I find this castle? Do you have any information to help me?”

Just then Anar (Pomegranate) came into the tunnel from the king's library. “Dive into lake. Way you came from. Castle up high. No goblin, only spirit.”

Motley nodded and added, “Thank you, Anar, for demonstrating your English; next time, please

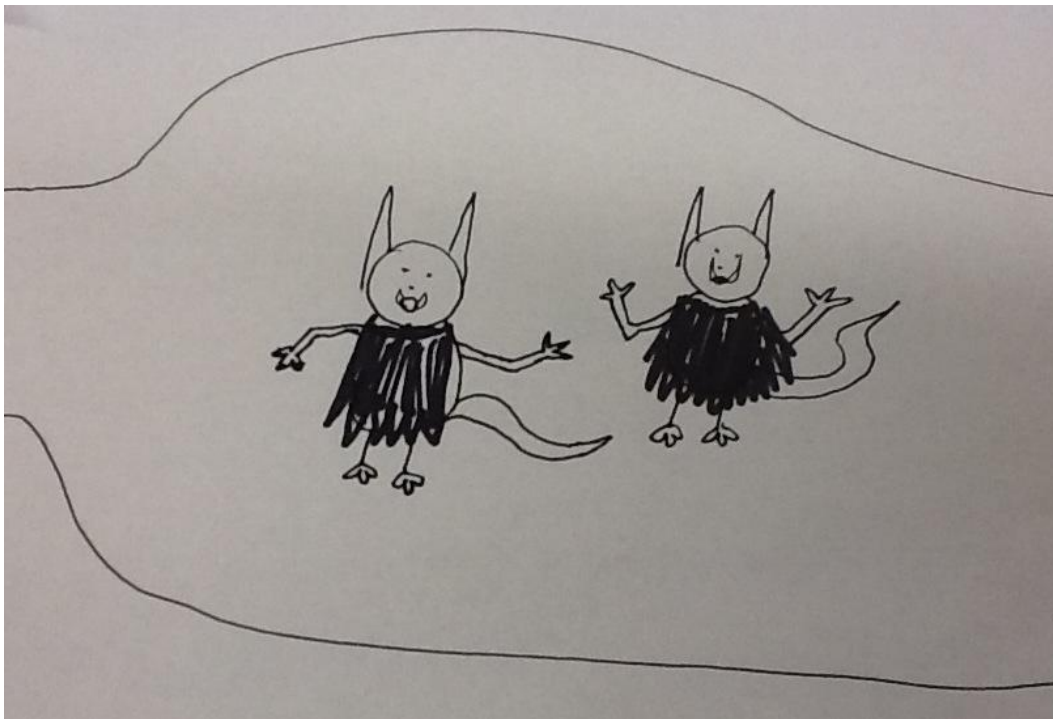
say it in Spoof, it was a little unclear. I think what Anar meant to say was 'I was reading in a big book in the king's library. I then found out where the castle is and came to tell you.' ”

I eagerly responded, “I will go at once and find the castle.” I awoke from my dream with a start, and then remembered where I was.

Slowly, a memory of how I came to be here in the prison again two weeks ago came to me. I was running and running, my dragon behind me. My dragon roared, tried to bat away a guard, and then dissolved in a puff of smoke. A guard came at me, snarling, “So you returned, you rat! I bet you thought you could get away from the prison!” Another guard came over. I recognized him as the one who determined which cell people went into-- the room with 5 beds that holds 50 people, the one with no beds that holds 100 people or the one underground, which is just a big cave. I got put in the cave, this same one that I was thinking of escaping from now.

I decided to explore the tunnel that led downwards. I poked my head over the edge of the tunnel and gasped when I saw that it was a steep drop disappearing into a dark hole. I saw it was smooth on the side so I couldn't climb down. I looked at my choices. I could either jump into the unknown or be held prisoner in this cave for the rest of my life.

I took a deep breath and jumped. As I fell, I remembered what it was like jumping into the well. My stomach jumped up in my throat, just like before. I looked down and glimpsed a rock; then, what do you know? Everything went black.



## CHAPTER 2: ESCAPE FROM THE CAVE

When I came to, I was floating in the air (or so I thought). Was this a dream? It wasn't a dream because my head hurt from the crash into the rock. "How can this be possible?" was my next thought. I felt some pressure from below me so I looked down. I saw a vent blowing up thick gray smoke. "The smoke must be holding me up. No, the pressure must be holding me up," I reasoned.

But then, as I was floating there pondering what to do, I smelled something unusual. What was it? It was the smoke. The smoke didn't smell like fire smoke, the smoke smelled like volcano smoke. By the smell of the smoke, I guessed I had about 5 minutes to escape. I thought for a minute and then remembered that the shirt I was wearing, which the king had given me, was fireproof. I knew what to do.

I waited until the volcano was 30 seconds from exploding, and put my plan to action. I hurriedly took off my shirt and laid it down on top of the smoke. I climbed on top of my shirt and then waited a very tense 5 seconds before the blast began. The momentum was incredible and I was flung upwards.

I heard the cry of other prisoners as the lava poured down. I saw the roof of the cave coming closer, closer, closer ... and it dissolved from the heat. Rocks, gravel, and mortar rained down around me but somehow I stayed safe. Everything below me was being destroyed. At first I was frightened, but once I saw that my shirt really was fireproof, I realized my plan was working! I calmed myself intently and waited for a while, eventually dozing off.

When I awoke I was lying on a big pile of rubble. I said out loud, "How did I get here?" and then I remembered the volcano. I decided to get up and look around. I saw rubble to my left, solidifying magma to my right and water all around the magma and rubble. Had I been thrown into an ocean? It looked like the prison had been on an island, not far into the sea, and if I could just figure out how to get to shore...

I sighed at how these events kept unfolding, and then came up with a plan. I looked around the rubble for something that could float. To my delight, I found a plank of some strange wood that was not very burnt. I looked around and found a metal pole and with all my strength pushed it into the wood.

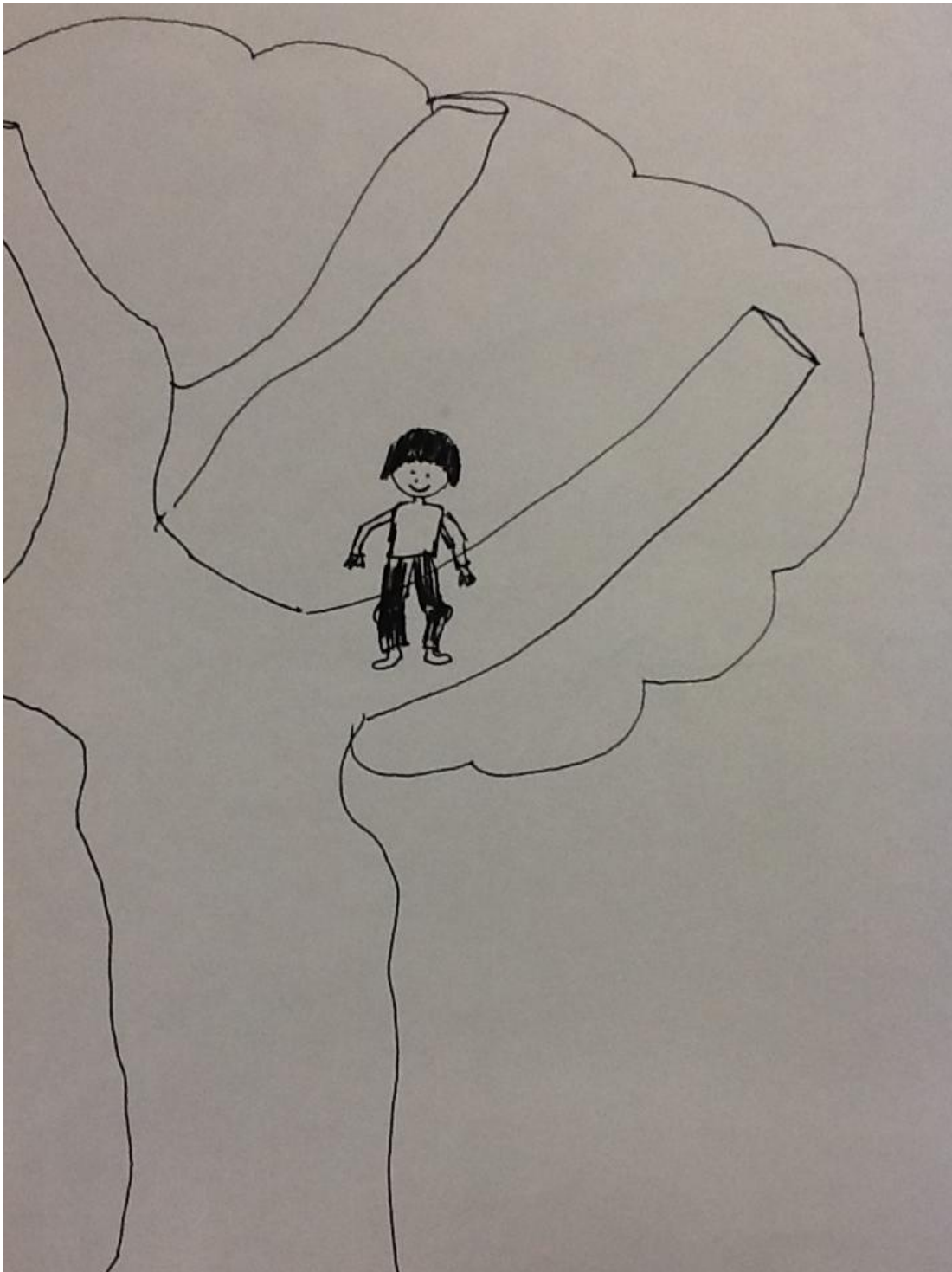
I tied my shirt to the pole, thus forming a mini-boat. It caught the breeze nicely and I proceeded to float out of the rubble island. When I was sailing to the mainland, I was a bit worried that my foot would be chopped off by a hungry shark, but to my luck it wasn't. The ride was mostly peaceful. It would have been more peaceful if some minnows hadn't thought my toes were bait.

When I arrived on land, I looked around to make sure the coast was clear. Then I scrambled up a tree. From above I glanced around at my inhabited surroundings. I noticed an attractive city block, where the streets were oddly familiar. I got down from the tree and hurried over to the street sign. The



sign read "Daffodil Street." Then it hit me why this street looked so familiar. Daffodil Street was where my grandparents lived. I decided to go to their house right away and let them know I was still alive, since I assumed they had not had any news about me after my father died.

My dream of the goblins stuck with me and I figured that I would have to find some information about the castle and the day that it would appear. I squared my shoulders, climbed down from the tree, and began the long path back to civilization.



## CHAPTER 3: CIVILIZATION

As I sat in my grandmother's lap she said, "Dear, you must tell us everything," and so I did. She held me tight while I told her all of my story, starting from when my mother and brother died in that horrible house fire, how my father took me in to live with him, how my father died of fever and how I ended up in prison. Then I told of how I had dove into the well and came up in the magical land. I also told of how I solved the night goblin problem, my new quest, and how I ended up here.

My grandfather, a sailor and an anthropologist who liked to find out a lot about speech and culture, had listened quietly to my story. After he heard what I wanted to do next, he said almost immediately, "I guess we have to go to the library tomorrow and research about the castle."

That night as I lay under the covers, I had a vision. I am in the house and going down a long stairway. I start to run. It gets darker and darker. I come to a stone wall with a weird carving. I push on the stone wall but to no avail, so I grab a notch on the carving and rotate it. The stone falls to the floor. I enter the space and begin to run. I run very fast and come to a mysterious, dark looking mass. It turns out to be a deep, dark cave. I slowly and cautiously advance into the cave. I see a blinding light. It's too bright, too bright ....

"Wake up! Wake up!" my grandfather said. "We are going to the library to find out about that castle."

I groggily sat up. "OK," I said.

Once we entered the library, we went in search of the book about mystical castles. To my delight, I found just the book I was looking for. It was called *Mystical Castles*. The table of contents said the chapters were: *The Beneath the Well Castle*, *The Legendary Castle*, and *The Castle of the Skybirds*. I decided to check out the *Legendary Castle* chapter. It was a long, dull chapter, and I quickly read, "Discovered over 1200 years ago, blah blah, 1812 burned down, blah blah, spot where it was located - 2103 Sun Street, Austin, TX." It was definitely not the castle of my dreams.

I next read about the *Castle of the Skybirds*. The first thing that the chapter said was, "This castle is visible only on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, for only one hour, starting at 2:00pm, each year." Bingo! That was in 2 weeks! I roused my grandfather, who had fallen asleep, and shared my find. He suggested learning about *Skybirds* and their speech may be helpful. I would soon discover how wise a suggestion this was.

I ended up checking out 3 books, *Mystical Castles*, *All about Skybirds* and *How to Speak Skatch: the Skybird Language, a Beginner's Guide*. When I got back to my grandparent's house, I was curious about how a *Skybird* looks so I opened the *All about Skybirds* book. A *Skybird* has the body of a bat and the head of an eagle. You might expect a *Skybird* to be the size of a normal bird, but it is ten times bigger!

I was eager to read more about my quest in the Skybirds Castle chapter and was startled by what I found. How to get to the mystical castle was written in “Skatch,” the Skybird language. Good thing I had the other books!

I opened *How to Speak Skatch* and the first thing I saw was that Skatch is made up of a series of squawks and screeches. After 20 minutes, I was able to say “I come in peace,” or “Skree schoom, squawk.” After 2 hours, I was able to say “I come in peace, please don't hurt me, you're beautiful, you look spectacular.” This was useful because I also learned that Skybirds are vain. Finally after 2 days of hard work, I was almost fluent. Just then, my grandmother came in with a peanut butter and banana sandwich.

“Skreema eep, shoo!” I cried.

“What?” she asked in confusion.

“Oops! I meant, that looks very good,” I said.

“I don't know what has gotten into you,” my grandmother replied, shaking her head and smiling, “but, anyway, you can enjoy the sandwich.”

After I devoured the sandwich, I opened *Mystical Castles* to the page that was written in Skybird. I began to read.... The first thing I read was in the Skybird text and it said, “To get to our castle, go to the basement of house 29 on Daffodil Street, San Francisco, CA, USA.” I read it again just to be sure I was reading it right. Lucky for me I already had access to that basement. It was the one in my grandparents' house.





## CHAPTER 4: TO THE CASTLE

It was the day before August 7<sup>th</sup>. Though I was sad to leave my grandparents since I had just found them after such a long time, I felt I needed to help the king. I hugged my grandparents quickly, not wanting to leave time for tears. I needed my courage. As the instructions in the book said, I had to depart at 10:00 pm with perfume, food and water to last me 3 days, and some burlap bags. It was 9:55 so I walked down the basement stairs. I came to a stone door with a strange carving- it looked just like the one in my dream! Instead of trying to knock it down, I grasped a notch in the door and turned it. The door fell down, and I saw a tunnel longer than the house could possibly be. I ran for a long time, and saw an entrance to a cave and a bright light shining out. Out from the light stepped a Skybird. Using my best Skatch, I told her of my wish to see their beautiful castle.

The Skybird spoke in Skatch. "If I take you there, what would you give me?"

I hastily took out the perfume and said in Skatch, "This! You look so beautiful, but this will make you smell even better." Just as I had read, she was easily flattered.

This Skybird seemed so pleased, as if I had just told her the most wonderful thing in the world. "Well," she stated, "I would love to take you up there for that!"

I climbed up on the Skybird's back and she dove into the cave. She plunged down into what looked like a bottomless pit. I was terrified but was able not to scream. Suddenly, she leveled out and flew out a side tunnel I hadn't noticed. After flying level for a while I noticed a faint light coming from above. The Skybird proceeded to fly upwards. I saw white fluffy clouds. Suddenly, the Skybird stopped flying and landed on a cloud.

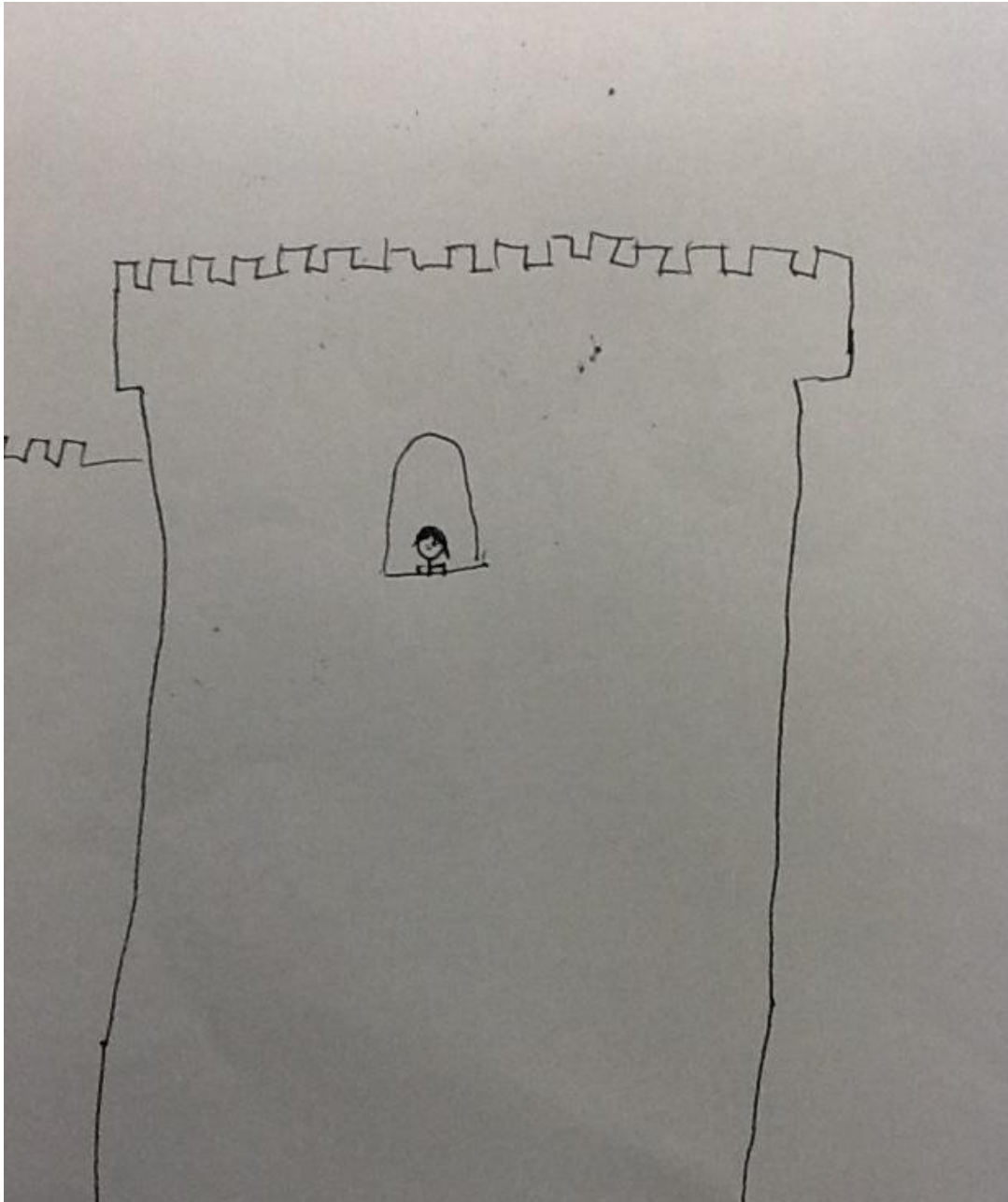
"Here," the Skybird said as I dismounted, "Take some cloud and rub it on your eyes." I did. To my surprise, I could see the castle, even though it was still ten minutes to 2:00 on the 7<sup>th</sup>. "The clouds make you able to see things that aren't visible to the human eye," the Skybird said.

"Watch your head!" she said, as a flock of Skybirds flew over us. "Go, you must get the thing you are looking for," the Skybird's voice was urgent. "When the castle becomes visible to the untrained eye, the Skybirds lock all the doors and attack any who come near."

I thanked the Skybird and hurried to the castle gate. I found it was locked, so I dug a hole in the cloud and crawled through the tunnel to the other side of the gate. Lying low, I scampered to the castle door, and found it was open. Just as I had read, I went into the castle and went up to the highest turret. On the floor of the turret, I found a trap door. Opening the trapdoor, I saw gold and jewels of all kinds. I was about to reach in and take some gold when I remembered something. The book had said not to take any of the treasures with my hand or else an alarm would go off. I took off my shoes and socks then reached with my toes and touched a ruby. Nothing. The ruby felt smooth, and I was tempted to take it, but the king had only asked for his gold back and I was content with sticking to my mission.

With my toes, I picked up enough gold pieces to fill the bag I had brought with me. I hurriedly sealed the bag and planned my return to the king. As I walked to the door, a feeling of pride came over me; I was going to be able to do this!

As I was about to depart the turret, I heard a clang. And when I tried to open the door, the pride turned to fear. All the doors were now locked, for it was the 7<sup>th</sup> of August and 2:00 pm. I was trapped!



## CHAPTER 5: ESCAPE FROM THE CASTLE

I was sitting in the turret feeling miserable when I heard the clack of a Skybird's talons unlocking the door. When the Skybird peeked inside, I scrambled toward the far side of the room and tucked the bag under my shirt. "Please don't hurt me!" I cried in Skatch. This must have caught the Skybird by surprise, because it stopped coming towards me.

"I won't hurt you," the Skybird said. "It isn't every day I meet a Skatch-speaking human."

"Oh, thank-you, beautiful bird," I replied in my best Skatch.

"I must know how you learned to speak Skatch!"

"Well, I hope you are used to disappointment." I didn't want to reveal too much about myself. This proved to be useful, because it only heightened the curiosity of the Skybird.

"I'll make a deal with you. I will take you to back to your homeland if you tell me how you learned to speak Skatch."

"Deal."

So that was how I got the treasure and returned back to my grandparents' house. My grandfather, who was eagerly awaiting my arrival, sailed me to the well and waited for me while I delivered the treasure. I grasped the treasure bag, and dove into the well. I saw a rock. Thump. I had time to think, "Maybe next time I will learn to dive feet first," before everything went black. When I came to, I was lying in the night goblin tunnel. "Here, take the treasure to the king," I said, in Spoof, to the night goblin who was guarding it.

"Okay, great!" was the reply. After I was sure the treasure had been delivered to the king, I told them about my plan. The night goblins were unhappy about it, but agreed it was the best for me.

After saying my farewells to the night goblins, prince, and king, I went to the edge of the lake. Taking a deep breath, I dove into the lake. Swimming down, I saw a black opening and swam through it. I swam upward and popped out in the well. I exited the well and sailed with my grandfather to shore and into the warm embrace of my grandmother.

You never know what you might find above the well...