

The Boo's Secret

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Submitted: April 20, 2008

Updated: June 29, 2008

First fan fic ever! =O

Nintendo stuff (c) Nintendo

Shelly, Lee, Kev, Bau, Karmella (c) me

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1 - Boo!

"What're you looking for now?"

Shelly looked up from the cupboard under the sink and blinked.

"Uhm... I don't actually know..." The grey Panther said.

She stood up and straightened her long, black silken dress and brushed a curl of red hair away from her eyes.

Her husband sighed and shook his head slowly. "You've got to stop doing this. You've been searching the house for... Whatever it is you're looking for, for weeks now!"

"I know it's here somewhere!" Shelly huffed. "And I'll recognise it when I see it."

"So you've said." Lee replied, starting to feel impatient.

Shelly walked past him and headed down the steps into the house's cellar.

"Where're you going now?" He grunted.

"I ain't checked down here yet." She called back.

"You checked last night!"

"I know. But it could've turned up overnight!"

"What?! I do hope it's not Rats and 'roaches you've been looking for!" He shouted.

Before Shelly could reply, the door bell rang.

"Oh no." Lee said. "They're here... Get your backside up here!"

He straightened his tie and headed for the kitchen door.

"And please. No more searching tonight. I really need this promotion."

The two Panthers sat on the couch opposite the Hyena couple. Dinner had gone well and Lee was happily chatting to his boss, explaining his plans for the future. The Hyena listened with genuine interest whilst his wife sat next to him, sipping her cup of tea.

Shelly leaned back and sank into the plush sofa cushions, starting to feel light headed and queasy. She rubbed the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes as she slowly lost consciousness.

"Is your wife alright?" Was the last thing she heard before total darkness swallowed her.

Dust tickled her nose and she rubbed at it as she slowly opened her eyes. She looked around the living room, panic slowly settling in her gut as she took in the dark and dusty surroundings of a room identical to her own living room. But it seemed older, more aged and neglected. The furniture wasn't like her own modern decor and the fire place was open and looked used. Dust and cobwebs hung over everything, dominating whatever they touched.

Shelly looked down at herself and instead of finding her long, slender body wrapped in black silk, she saw a small, child like figure clad in an old, fading red tee, worn blue jeans and a pair of grubby trainers that looked to have seen better days. She remembered wearing such clothes when she was younger. Her long, red, wavy hair was loosely tied back with an old red scrunchie.

Shelly pushed herself off the dusty old sofa and landed heavily. The floor boards creaked as she walked across the room towards the door.

She twisted the knob and pulled open the door with a creak and slowly made her way down the old hallway. As she did so, she peeked into the rooms she passed. The old house had the same layout as her own. The rooms, the furniture, even the pictures and ornaments were in the same position as her own. But it wasn't hers. None of it was. It was someone else's. Or had been a long time ago. And the whole place had a cold, unwelcoming feel to it, like the building didn't want her there.

As she rounded the corner at the end of the hall, into the main hall, something behind her laughed. Shelly slowly turned around, her fear rising and saw nothing but the old house behind her. She turned back around and heard the same laugh. But when she turned around again, nothing was there. She continued towards the front door and broke into a run when she heard the same, evil laugh again.

Shelly whimpered when the door wouldn't open. She tried again, but still it wouldn't budge, no matter how much force she put it under.

Something knocked her to the floor from behind, knocking the air from her lungs. The air around her grew cooler and she hazarded a look up.

She squeaked lightly and curled up into a ball on the dusty floor, her face buried in her paws, desperately trying to shut out the image of the ghost above her.

She sobbed quietly into her paws for a few moments, quietly willing for it to go away. A few more minutes passed and she peeked out at its evil face.

As soon as it realised she was looking at it, it covered its eyes and disappeared. Shelly shuddered and forced herself to keep looking at where it had been. After a couple of minutes the air shimmered and it partially re-appeared then quickly vanished again. She waited another few minutes, her confidence slowly building and watched with amused interest as it peeked at her again.

An airy sigh filled the silence and the ghost fully materialised again, with an unimpressed look spread on its features.

"What happened to the whole running away thing?" It said, flailing its small, stubby arms in frustration. Shelly just looked at it, her brain refusing to let her do anything but stare in mild amusement.

"What?" It said. "Never seen a Boo before?"

Shelly shook her head numbly.

"Great. A mute." The Boo grunted.

"I'm not a mute!" Shelly suddenly protested. "Where am I...?" She added after a moment's pause.

"In my house. And I wanna know how you got in. I keep everything locked." The Boo said suspiciously.

"I don't know. One minute I'm sat on the sofa next to my husband, and the next I'm here in a twisted version of my house."

"Husband? You look a little too young for that kinda thing."

"I'm twenty seven!"

"You look about ten. If you don't believe me, there's a mirror over there."

Shelly hesitated before pulling herself upright and slowly walked towards the mirror the ghost was pointing at.

She wiped some dust off its surface with her paw.

"What's going on?" She faltered and shrank back from the mirror. "And why am I here?" She whimpered.

"Beats me." The Boo said. "But good luck finding out. The spare key's under that vase."

"Wait! You can't leave me alone! I have no idea where I am or how to get home!" She said to the retreating ghost.

2 - Whomp's Toll

"Ok. So what you're trying to say is that I'm nowhere my own planet?" Shelly said as she padded down the dirt track that wound across the bright fields.

"Well, you obviously ain't on your own planet." The Bau said as he floated beside her.

"Great. So I gotta ask someone if I can borrow their space ship." Shelly grumbled, suddenly feeling very alone.

"Er, no. You got here by magic, so that's how you're gonna get back."

The grey Panther and ghost travelled in silence for a few minutes.

"Do you have a name?" Shelly asked suddenly.

"What?"

"Well I can't keep calling you Boo. You must have a name."

"I do. And you can."

"Huh?" Shelly gave him a puzzled look.

"It's my name."

"What, Boo?"

"Yup. Spelt B - A - U. Bau." He said. "What about you?"

"I'm Shelly."

They continued on for the next half hour in silence.

"Once we get to the town, you're on your own."

"Wait, you're gonna abandone me?" Shelly squeaked.

"I just said I'll help you. That's what I'm doing. Helping you. All you gotta do in town is ask Karmella to send you home."

Shelly stared at Bau in horror.

"She's a Magikoopa. And a damn good one too. Just tell her that Bau'll owe her for it."

When they arrived at the bridge that crossed the river, they were startled by a large slab of stone glaring down at them.

"What the hell is that?!" Shelly exclaimed.

"More to the point, why didn't we see it from the hill?" Bau said and cursed. "Oi, you glorified flag stone! Outta our way!" He shouted angrily.

"You pay Whomp twenty coins to pass." It growled.

"Twenny coins? I ain't got that kind of money! Out of our way!"

"Or what?" The Whomp said menacingly as he towered over the pair.

"We'll tip you over!" Shelly hazarded defiantly.

"Backwards!" Bau added.

The Whomp shuddered and toppled forward. Shelly dived to one side and coughed harshly on the mass of swirling dust.

She watched as the Whomp awkwardly righted itself, leaving a flat, round white circle on the floor in the center of an imprint of it's huge face.

"Bau!" Shelly screamed.
A muffled "I'm ok" drifted up from the floor.

Bau grunted and popped back into shape with some effort.
"That was unexpected." He said, rubbing his head.
"Boo and kitty girl pay up now or suffer another Whomping." It growled.
"NEVER!" Bau shouted defiantly, and Shelly winced, covering her eyes as the Whomp shuddered again.
Bau passed right through the Whomp as it fell, drawing a sigh of unexpected relief from Shelly.

"Run!" He shouted at Shelly and the pair took off across the bridge, leaving the angry Whomp behind.
"Gawd." The Boo panted. " I ain't moved that quick in years."
"Well, we're nearly there." Shelly wheezed as she looked into the distance.
"Oh good. The sooner we get there, the sooner we can both go 'ome."

The old town bustled around them. Shouts and calls of different natures filled the air as the various residents went about their daily business.
"It's market day." Bau grunted as a Goomba passed through him.
"I did notice." Shelly said, trying not to giggle at the ghost.

They made their way across the market square, weaving and dodging through the heaving masses of bodies.
Bau pointed out a deep purple tent with gold markings set up in a quiet corner.
"That's Karmella's tent." Bau said "Good luck."

Bau retreated back into the crowd before Shelly could say anything, leaving her stood alone in an alien town, looking at the surroundings. She walked towards the tent and gingerly pulled back the curtain and peered into the gloomy interior of the tent. Two double candle stands stood diagonally from one another, lighting up a round table in the middle.

A robed figure with glasses sat at the table, calmly watching her.
"The outcast is on his way home now." Karmella said softly " But you. You don't want to go home, do you?"
"Yes I do! That's why I'm here!"
"Ah. That home. I'm afraid I can't send you there."
"Why not?"
"I can only see things with my crystal ball and create simple potions. Half of my power is missing. If you want to go back to your false home, you'll have to retrieve my star."

Shelly stared open mouthed at the Magikoopa. Karmella stood up and shuffled around the table and towards the small, grey Panther.
"Ever wonder why no one at school liked you Shelly? It was because you didn't belong there. They knew that. They knew you were an outcast."
Shelly gaped, and Karmella raised a hand. "I'm sure you'll find out more on your trek up north."
"How'd you know my name?" Shelly asked suspiciously.

Karmella just grinned and placed a deep purple bag in her paw.

"There's a map, twenty coins and some food in there. Only return once you have found my Power Star. Now shoo!" Karmella said and ushered Shelly back out into the market square.

She squinted in the bright light and gripped the bag tightly and headed for the north gate.

3 - Bob-Ombs Away!

Shelly left the town behind and started making her way towards the location marked on the map that the Magikoopa had given her. She figured that the easiest route would be through the forest, bypassing the mountains.

She carefully made her way through the forest, keeping as close to the stream that wound through it, as possible.

Squirrels, birds and various other creatures chattered away happily in the thick tree canopy above her. Streaks of orange light filtered down into the forest, lighting small areas of the ground. As she walked, she could feel hundreds of tiny eyes watching her. Bushes and trees started rustling more and more in a non-existent breeze. Shelly looked around and picked up her pace, walking as quickly as she could without tripping over anything.

"If you're trying to frighten me again Bau, it's not working." She lied. She stumbled backwards suddenly and yelped when she landed heavily on the forest floor. A small, furry black creature with large eyes stared up at her from her lap and fidgeted. An explosion echoed through the forest and the creature screamed madly and attacked her, scratching and pulling at her grey fur.

Shelly screamed and rolled about on the mossy ground, trying desperately to dislodge the creature. She screamed again as more of them jumped at her, seemingly from nowhere, piling on top of her, smothering her. She could feel herself tiring quickly as they scratched and gnawed at her, but she refused to give up. Another explosion, this one closer, shook her, almost deafening her. The creatures scattered when they heard the explosion and retreated back into the forest, leaving the grey Panther curled up on the forest floor gasping for breath.

The world spun around her and she felt weak and light headed. A strange bubbling chirp beside her drew her attention and she felt herself being gently pulled into a sitting position. Her head spun nauseatingly and she squeezed her eyes shut, desperately trying not to be ill. "Here, take this." Said a soft male voice.

Shelly felt the lip of a bottle gently press against her lips and the sweet scent of honey filled her nostrils. Her stomach growled hungrily and she drank the offered honey, the thick, gooey liquid sliding down her gullet.

"Whut 'appened?" She burbled, feeling her strength returning. "You were attacked by a pack of Fuzzies. They latch onto their prey and drain them of their energy. Luckily for you, I was around with my bag of Bob-Ombs."

Shelly looked at her rescuer, squeaked in horror and fell over sideways. "My appearance isn't that shocking, is it?" The grey and black spikey Koopa said and pulled her upright

again.

Shelly gaped for a moment, struggling to find words. "What are you?" She eventually said with caution.

"A freak of nature is the easiest way of putting it." He replied openly, with a grin.

"What's the not-so easy way of putting it?"

The Koopa chuckled. "My mum was an underground Koopa and my dad was a Spikey. What about you? I thought your lot were extinct." He said, eyeing her up.

"Extinct?" Shelly sputtered.

"Yeah, your lot helped to protect this land millions of years ago. They lived in a hidden city."

Shelly raised her eyebrows and laughed.

"Oh I wish." She giggled. "Be better than my current life story."

She sighed and recalled what Karmella had said about her not belonging.

"Ok, forget what I said. I'm a bit of a useless information geek sometimes."

Shelly smiled and stood up, brushing herself off and picked her bag up.

"Uhm... What direction you going in?" She asked after a pause.

"Eh, either way. I'm a wanderer. I ain't got nothing better to do. Why? Need company?"

Shelly hesitated then nodded.

"Alright, lead on then! Er, what's your name by the way?"

"Shelly."

"Kevin. But I prefer Kev."

"Oh, and thanks for saving me." Shelly said coily.

"Welcome." The Koopa grinned. "Now, where're we going?"

Shelly pulled out her map and showed it to Kev.

"I'm after that power star. It belongs to a Magikoopa called Karmella. Without it, I can't get home." She sighed. "Oh god! Lee!"

"Lee?"

"My husband. I've probably just destroyed his chances of getting that promotion!" She whimpered.

"Husband?" Kev said in shock. "You look a tad too--"

"Young. I know. I look like I'm ten. When I came here, everything changed."

Kev looked thoughtful for a few moments.

"What?" Shelly asked suspiciously.

"Interesting... The last incident like yours happened exactly one thousand years ago today."

"So...? What happened to them? Did they get home? Did they-" She paused, halting herself.

"Find what they were looking for?" ev said, finishing her last question then shrugged. "Dunno. There's not much about it in the history books."

Shelly gaped at him.

"North's this way." Kev said suddenly, breaking the silence and started walking.

"Well, d'you know what species they were?" She asked hopefully.

"Some kind of Feline I think. I do know they were female and claimed to be twenty six." He said and stepped over a protruding root. "There's a cave just down here where we can stay the night."

"How long d'you think it'll take to get to the star's location?"

"Couple of days, assuming nothing goes horribly wrong."

4 - Footless And Body Heat Free

Shelly let Kev lead the way to the edge of the forest as she explained how she got to the Mushroom Kingdom.

The grey and black Spikey Koopa listened with interest, absorbing and answering any of her questions as best he could.

"So, were all these Felines like me?" She asked.

"Small and pale? Supposedly, yeah. But when their numbers started dwindling, they opened the city gates to whoever turned up with one of the silver pendants they hid through out the world. It was always people like you or me who turned up on their door step though. It was like the world guardians were giving the loners, wanderers and out casts a second chance to do something with themselves and also giving them a chance to fit in with a crowd. Unfortunately, that's pretty much all I know on that subject. I'd love to learn more, but there's just no way how."

Shelly paused a moment. "Hmmm... Out cast. Sums me up in one."

Kev nodded in grim agreement.

"So, what were you doing in the forest?"

"Looking for something. Dunno what I'm looking for, but I'm pretty certain I'll know it when I see it." He chirped. "Kinda like you actually..."

The forest started thinning out and they stepped out into a wide valley.

"Woah." Shelly said in open mouthed awe as she looked at the lush green vastness.

"Once we get to the otherside of this valley, we'll be about half way there." Kev said.

"Only one problem though; The place is inhabited by Shy Guys." Said a familiar voice from behind.

The pair spun around and gave a short shriek as an evil face dominated their field of vision.

Bau cackled and floated back a few feet and sighed.

"If you wann be getting throguh Shy Valley in one piece, I'd suggest dressing and acting as a Shy Guy."

The Boo said and pulled out three red robes with white masks.

"I thought you went home?" Shelly said.

"I did. Buuuut Karmella started pestering me about the whole situation." Bau huffed. "Anyway, who and what the hell are you?" He said, pointing a stubby arm at the Spikey Koopa.

"I'm a Spikey Koopa." Kev replied defensively.

Bau looked him over, a smile slowly spreading across his face and he started laughing.

"Shut it, sheet face. I can probably haunt a lot better than you can." Kev snapped.

Bau stopped laughing and glared at the Koopa. "So what if I'm smaller than most Boos. Doesn't make me any less meaner." He grumbled.

"When you two are done with arguing, could we please move on? Now, gimme a robe and mask." Shelly said and Bau handed her a long, red robe along with a near featurless mask that sent shivers up and done the Panther's spine when she looked at it.

"Well, you gonna put it on or what?" Bau said impatiently.

Shelly blinked then nodded numbly, pulling the robe over her her, fastening the belt and pulling the mask on as Kev had done.

"Y'know, they're probably gonna notice that you're footless." Kev said as they approached the town that dominated a large part of the valley.

"I think they'll be paying more attention to those spikes of yours that are threatening to tear through the fabric of your robe." Bau retorted.

"We appreciate the robes Bau, but you didn't have to come with us." Shelly said, hoping to stop the argument before it fully erupted.

"You're right; I didn't have to come, it's just that, well... I'm looking for something too. Have been for the past two weeks." The ghost said hesitantly.

"What were you looking for?" Kev asked.

Bau shrugged and continued on in silence.

Shy Town wasn't very busy. It was clean, quiet and had a somewhat welcoming air to it. There were a couple of shops, a restaurant and an inn lining the narrow street they were walking down.

"What do we do now? There doesn't seem to be another way out." Shelly said, starting to feel worried.

"We look for a warp pipe." Bau said as he too started to feel uneasy.

"Then I suggest we do so quick. I have a horrible feeling we're being watched." Kev agreed.

"What's a warp pipe?" Shelly hissed, suddenly feeling the need to keep her voice level low as they entered the centre of the town, many masked faces turning to look at them.

"You'll know it when you see it." Bau whispered as they continued across the town center.

Two blue Shy Guys stepped out in front of them as they passed under an arch and blocked their route. Shelly could hear Bau quietly swearing to himself whilst Kev had stopped dead, standing stone still.

"So much for the disguises." She mumbled to herself as the two Shy Guys eyed them suspiciously.

"Where're your feet?" One of them asked.

"Runs in the family." Bau said automatically.

"You done this before?" Kev whispered, low enough for Shelly and Bau to hear.

"I'm used to getting into and causing trouble. It's a Boo trait."

The Shy Guy motioned to his partner who promptly stepped forward and removed the three's masks.

"They're not as dim as they look, are they?" Bau said quietly, the corners of his mouth curving into a smile.

"Dispose of the intruders!" Shouted the other Shy Guy, and soon they were surrounded by multicoloured robes, all wearing the same, bleak expressions.

The mob of Shy Guys grabbed them and hauled them off down a wide street, towards a low, carved stone pipe. They dropped the three down the pipe one by one as if they were chucking rubbish into a bin.

Shelly, Kev and Bau landed roughly on the uneven stone floor below. The air was cold and musty, and the faint sound of dripping water and stone gently grinding on stone echoed about the dimly lit chamber.

"Where are we?" Shelly coughed.

"Below Shy Town in some kind of dungeon." Bau said, looking around into the murk.

"I think we're a bit further away than that." Kev said, rushing himself off as he stood up. "That pipe had more twists and turns, ups and downs than a roller coaster."

"But we're definitely underground, right?" Shelly asked nervously.

"Definitely." Kev said.

"I think," Bau said, looking at the masonry. "We're in an old fort somewhere..."

"I thought you said dungeon?" Shelly asked.

"I did. And that's where we are. In the dungeon of an old fortress." Bau replied coolly, still taking in his surroundings.

5 - Thwomp's Fortress

"I got a really bad feeling about this..." Shelly said as they slowly and carefully made their way into the next room.

A trickle of water ran in a small stream across the uneven floor and disappeared into a small grate in the far wall. Kev disgarded his torn robe while Shelly tucked her own and Bau's away in her seemingly bottomless bag. They walked a few more steps before Kev stumbled forward into a foot deep crater in the groun. Cracks branched out from the center of the rectangular depression and Shelly noticed that Bau was looking up into a large recess in the roof.

"Uhm.. I know where we are." He whimpered lightly.

"Where?" Kev grunted as Shelly helped him up.

"Thwomp's Fortress." The Boo replied weakly.

"Do I really want to know what a Thwomp is...?" Shelly asked cautiously.

"See this crater we're stood in?" Kev said, paling.

Shelly nodded.

"This was made by a Thwomp."

Shelly swallowed hard and quickly clambered out of the depression, the Spikey Koopa following close behind.

"The one that used to be here's long gone." Bau said with an air of reliefe. " But, if I were you, I'd look up on a regular basis, otherwise you'll be crushed."

Silence washed over the room as Shelly let those words sink in. After a moment's hesitation, they wandered around the dark room, looking for a way out.

"There's a set of steps leading up to the ground floor over here!" She called out.

"How d'you know that's the ground floor?" Bau asked.

"I can smell fresh air." The Panther replied, flaring her nostrils and inhaling deeply.

Bau and Kev approached the stairs and did the same.

"That's where the exit is." The Koopa said, excitement seeping into his voice.

"And the Thwomps."

"And the pits."

They all exchanged looks and Kev headed up the steps first, followed by Shelly and Bau. They came out at the far end of a long, wide landing; large shadows hung over cracked depressions in the floor, much like the one they'd seen in the dungeon below.

They looked up at the recesses in the roof, each one with a large, near-oblong cluster of spiked stones filling the gaps, some of which, seemed to be moving gently, as if they were floating. The sound of stone gently grinding against stone filled the silence once again and dust fell to the ground along with clumps of rock.

"Some of them are fake." Kev whispered hoarsly.

"How d'you know?" Bau criticized.

"There's a slight difference in colours. The darker ones are the fakes."

"Great." Shelly mumbled. "We're gonna be crushed by a fake Thwomp."

"Try to go around their shadows, but try and avoid the dodgy floor stones."

They carefully edged around the large shadows that loomed overhead whilst being careful not to stand on any loose stones in the floor that were precariously scattered about the large landing. Kev gave a cry of dismay when the floor gave way beneath his feet as he sidled along the wall, the tough, grey spikes on his black shell grinding and scratching against the cold stone as he fell. He grunted when he caught hold of the crumbling ledge. Below him, the remnants of the stone floor he'd been standing on, lay at the bases of old, rusted spikes.

The Spikey Koopa whimpered as he felt his grip loosen when the ground shook violently, a deafening bang echoing throughout the landing.

Shelly screamed as she dove toward the struggling Koopa, avoiding a falling Thwomp by a scant few inches as she ran beneath it towards Kev. She tried desperately to ignore how close she was to being crushed, but couldn't resist a look behind her. A cold chill ran up and down her spine when she saw the face in the massive stone block. It was like looking at a giant mask of pure hatred.

She pulled her attention back to Kev and gripped his wrist with both paws as the Thwomp retreated back into its recess in the roof, shuddering once more as the air shifted strongly behind her as it moved. Further down, another Thwomp came crashing down to the floor, shaking more dust and lumps of stone loose across the landing as Bau raced across to help Shelly and Kev.

"What happened?" The Boo panted, then jumped as the Thwomp behind them landed with a crash again.

"What d'you think happened?!" Kev snapped angrily.

Bau grunted a sigh and grabbed the Koopa's other wrist and helped Shelly pull him up.

A sudden thought occurred to the grey Panther, so spontaneously, that she couldn't help but blurt out

"Don't they ever get bored?"

"Incredibly!" Boomed a voice from above and a growling chorus of agreement swiftly followed.

The three looked at one another.

"I think we better get out of here before they decide to chase us!" Kev panted.

Shelly looked at him in horror before scrambling to her feet.

"The main door's locked, but we can climb out of the front window up on the next floor." Bau said and took off, weaving between the Thwomp's shadows.

They took their chances and ran after the Boo, narrowly avoiding the pitfalls and being crushed by the Thwomps.

"Why would someone build a place like this?" Shelly wheezed when they reached the stair case at the end of the hall.

"It used to be a prison." Kev panted as they started to ascend the steps.

"That explains the spikey pits and Thwomps." Bau said as he floated ahead of them.

"Why did they stop using it?" Shelly hazarded.

"The visitors and guards kept getting crushed."

"Thwomps are compulsive crushers. They can't help it." Bau added and floated a little farther ahead.

6 - Dry Bones

"Compulsive would be one way of putting it..." They grey Panther huffed as she climbed onto the top step next to Bau.

She carefully poked her head out from the relative safety of the stair case and looked up. There didn't appear to be any Thwomps lurking in the roof. Shelly let out a small sigh of relief then looked to her left then right.

There were lots of bones scattered about. Some bones of the prisoners who'd been left behind in their cells, though the majority seemed to be skeletons of Koopas, some with armour on, most without.

"Dry Bones." Kev said, observing the scene from over Shelly's shoulder.

"Dare I ask what that is?"

"Dead Koopas. You knock 'em down, then they get right back up after a second or two."

"There's loads of them..." Bau said in a hushed tone.

Shelly looked back at the grey and black Spikey Koopa. "Do you have any of those Bob-ombs left?" She asked.

"A couple, why?"

"Incase they decide to lynch us." She replied, looking back at the masses of white bones.

They carefully edged into the large room, the slowly fading sunlight filtering in through the barred windows.

"There's our exit." Bau said softly, pointing to a barless window. "The bars are long gone and the exterior wall is climbable."

They picked their way through the bones and stone debris that littered the floor and carefully made their way towards the window. The faint sound of bones slowly scraping together froze them in mid stride.

They slowly looked around at the armourless Koopa skeletons that were now stood, watching them with interest, their white pupils gently glowing in their black sockets.

"Kay..." Kev said slowly. "Forget the whole 'be cautious' thing, just get to the window as quick as possible..." He said from the corner of his mouth.

The three took off at a sprint towards the window and the Dry Bones shrieked and went after them, their bones rattling loudly as they moved, charging towards the three from all directions, swarming around them in a clattering sea of white, jostling, scratching and biting.

Shelly lost her footing and fell to the floor, white, beaked faces filling her vision. A black and grey blur shattered a trio of Dry Bones, and when she looked up, she saw Kev emerging from his shell, kicking and punching at the throng of skeletons. She managed to find room to pull herself and lashed out at the Dry Bones herself, soon realising that Kev was holding a small black bomb with eyes in his hand, it's key slowly turning and it's fuse fizzing wildly.

"Get out the window!" He shouted above the din and tossed the small bob-omb.

He grabbed her wrist and dragged her through the crowd, towards the window where Bau was fending off more Dry Bones with an old metal pipe.

Kev barreled into the ghost and sent him backwards out of the window. Shelly quickly climbed down the uneven exterior wall with Kev following closely behind her. They desperately clinged to the stone as the explosion shook the fortress and rained debris down on them.

"I think that one had a little too much gun powder in it." Kev coughed.

"You think?" Bau sputtered from the ground as he shook dirt and debris off himself.

Kev and Shelly climbed down and joined the Boo.

"You tow alright?" He asked.

"I've been better." Shelly replied with a slight shake in her voice

"Eh, I'll live." Kev said, trying to reach a bone that had gotten wedged between the spikes on his shell.

Shelly reached over and plucked it from him, throwing it across the old courtyard.

"Thankyou." He sighed.

"And thankyou for saving me. Again."

"When we're done with the nicities, I'd like to get the hell outta here." Bau said, nervously looking around at the decaying, overgrown front courtyard.

Shelly pulled her map from her bag and unfurled it.

"Whereabouts are we?" She asked.

"Here." Kev said after a moment, pointing to a small picture of a fortress. "That's our current location.

"Wow. Those Shy Guys really did us a favour."

Kev and Shelly stared at Bau.

"What? Thwomp's fortress is only a day and a half's trek from the Power Star's location." Bau added.

"Then what're we waiting for? Let's go." Shelly said.

The three of them headed out of the main gates and started east, leaving the Thwomp's Fortress behind.

Flowery meadows spread out in all directions and soon the moon was shining brightly in the sky, giving everything a gently glow.

"Looks like we're sleeping under the stars tonight." Kev said looking up.

Shelly looked in her bag and groaned. "I'm almost out of food. I only have enough for tonight."

"Same here." Kev said with a sigh and sat down heavily in the long grass.

"There's a house over the next hill. I can get you some more grub tomorrow." Bau said, settling down next to them in the grass.

"Wow. Why the sudden burst of charity?" Kev asked, surprised.

"Well.... You're really the only ones who've been nice to me." Bau said awkwardly.

"Surely you've got other friends?" Shelly asked.

Bau shook his head.

"Yeah, don't Boos usually hang around in groups?" Kev said.

"Not me. I was laughed out of my tribe, or whatever you wanna call it."

"Why?"

"Because I'm rubbish at the regualr Boo stuff. And I'm smaller..." He said with downcast eyes.

They sat in silence for twenty minutes before they fell asleep.

7 - Flying Pans

Bau, Shelly and Kev woke up an hour after sunrise. They still ached after what happened the day before in Thwomp's Fortress.

Shelly yawned and rubbed the sleep from her eyes as Kev stretched every available limb. Bau was looking into the horizon where a black square stood.

"What's that?" Shelly asked sleepily.

"That's the place where I'm gonna get your food from." The Boo said, a sly tone creeping into his voice.

"That's the direction we need to be heading in anyway, so let's go." Kev said and strode forward.

They headed off across the meadow and towards the house that Bau had pointed out. Soon the sun was high in the cloudless sky and the squar dot was turning into a house, which in turn, was becoming more and more detailed with each step they took.

"What the-?" Kev said suddenly, breaking the silence and they all looked down at what was lay in the long grass at the grey and black Koopa's feet.

"It's a Catterpillar." Shelly said pointedly.

"More to the point; It's a Wiggler." Kev said nervously.

"Aaand you just stood on it." Bau added as they watched it's circular markings turn red.

They slowly backed away a few steps before turning towards the large house and breaking into a run.

"Are they chasing us?" Bau shouted behind him.

"I don't really wanna find out, so keep running just incase!" Kev panted.

"They? There was only one though! And that was tiny!" Shelly huffed.

"The parents have a tendancy to hang around until they're old enough to fend for themselves!" Kev wheezed.

"They can grow to the size of trains!" Bau added and they all sped up, resisting the fear driven urge to look behind.

They crested the hill and started to slow down. The house was in clear view now, the large windows glinting in the bright midday sunlight.

"We're nearly there!" Kev chirped eagerly.

They slowed down to a laboured walk and crept as quietly as possible towards the house, and hid in a bush outside a tall window. Bau disappeared through the wall and into the house in search of food whilst the grey and black Spikey Koopa and grey Panther waited patiently in their hiding spot for the Boo to reappear.

Half an hour passed and screams of anger and shock filled the silence. Shelly and Kev knelt upright in the bush to try and see through the window from their hiding place and only saw pots and pans being thrown, hitting the walls and clattering to the floor. They ducked down again as a frying pan crashed through the window and landed in the flower bed just infront of the bush. Bau quickly followed, grinning inanely with Shelly's bag in hand.

He darted off in the opposite direction as quickly as possible, paying no attention to the pair as more shouts, mainly anger, filled the air.

When Kev and Shelly caught up with Bau, they found him sat under a tree with the bag next to him. He was busy studying a silver disc that hung on a long silver chain a grin pasted on his face.

"Bau!" Shelly called.

Bau looked up.

"I found it!" He called back as the two neared him. "It was in a crate in the cheese cellar!"

"That's what you were looking for?" Shelly asked.

Bau nodded and held it up to the light

"Woah, that's... You found it in the cheese cellar?" Kev said, gaping, his exhaustion forgotten.

"Yup. Been looking for it for weeks now." The Boo grinned. "Er, what is it? I mean, does it do anything?"

"Y'know that hidden city I told you about?"

Bau and Shelly nodded.

"This is one of the pendants the guardians hid throughout the world for the outcasts to find." Kev said in awe as he looked at it closely.

Bau laughed. "Now all I gotta do is find the damned city and I'll be made for life! Oh, and I also got your food. It's not much, but it's all that I could get my hands on." He finished and handed the bag over. After they ate, they set off again, giving the hose a wide berth. They followed the river that ran in the direction of the Power Star's location as the sun started to sink below the horizon. Bau stashed away his pendant in Shelly's bag for safe keeping as they travelled.

Soon a large mass of shapes appeared on the horizon and the faint sound of water could be heard. As they walked on in the fading light, Shelly squinted, trying to make out the shapes.

"Is that where we're headed?" Shelly asked.

"I think so yeah. We'll have to check the map again, just to be sure." Kev said, settling down under a tree.

Shelly sat down next to him and pulled the map out, unfurling it and spreading it on the floor using a rock to pin down one end and her foot to pin down the other. Bau floated over and the three studied the large, yellowing piece of parchment carefully.

"Koopas Cape." Bau said after a moment.

"What's Koopas Cape?"

"A water park on the coast. It's sometimes shut down and used as a race track. There's several slides, a couple of which go under water through a massive see-through tube, rapids and a couple of waterfalls." Kev said.

"And that's where Karmella's Power Star is?" Shelly asked, excitement rising.

Kev nodded. "By the looks of what she's written on the map, yeah."

Shelly lay in the grass under the tree listening to the gentle snores of the Boo and Koopa, wondering what was going on on her own planet. Had Lee got the promotion or had her passing out quashed his efforts to impress his boss. She wondered idly if this was just a dream that she was having or if it was real and that upon passing out, she had somehow been taken to this strange world. She also wondered if she would ever find what she had been looking for.

The many questions bounced about her mind as sleep finally took over, wrapping it's cool darkness around her, blocking out the sounds, sights and smells around her.

8 - Koopa Cape

"Wake up!" Bau said. "We over slept!"

Shelly and Kev sat up slowly, rubbing the sleep from their eyes and squinted into the bright light. The weather was hot and sticky, and the view of Koopa Cape on the horizon shimmered invitingly in the heat.

"How far have we got to go now?" Shelly panted heavily as beads of sweat trickled down her grey fur. "Another ten minutes if we keep this pace up." Kev said and took another swig of his water before offering the Panther some.

Shelly took a grateful mouthful of the water, enjoying the feel of the cool liquid running down her gullet. They carried on, following Bau who was floating ahead, more eager to get to the water park than anyone else.

Soon the large clifftop park that was Koopa Cape came into clear view, dominating the near horizon. The sound of rushing water almost blocked out every other sound as the three headed towards the main gates where they came across a green shelled Koopa stood inside a small booth.

She looked from Bau, Shelly then to Kev in silence.

"Ten coins for a full day pass, five for half a day." She said, wiping a small cloth across her forehead. The three looked at each other.

"I have no coins!" Bau said, panic edging his tone.

"I have enough to pay for both of us for half a day. What about you Kev?" Said Shelly and she started rummaging about in her bag.

"I have enough." He said and handed the Koopa five coins.

Bau and Shelly paid and both had a coloured band wrapped around their wrists, as did Kev.

When they stepped through the main gates, they looked about themselves in awe.

"It's like an oasis." Shelly breathed.

Kev wasn't paying paying attention. His eyes were scanning the surroundings for a different reason.

"Do you hear that?" He said and cocked his head.

"Hear what?" Bau asked curiously.

"That... Tingling sound...."

The three stood still and listened carefully. Hidden beneath the layers of noise in the bustling water park, the faint sound of raw magic could be heard.

"It's close by..." The grey and black Koopa said.

"Whereabouts is it though?" Shelly said.

"Somewhere up on that waterfall, I think." Kev said, pointing to the top of a near by water slide.

"Up there?" Bau said and Kev nodded. "Er, did I mention, I'm not so good with heights..."

"I ain't good with heights either. Fell out of a tree when I was little and ended up with twelve stitches in my head." Shelly, with a grin.

The nervous Boo snorted a laugh and they followed Kev as he waded through an ankle deep stream

that would it's way throughout the park.

"There's a way up around the back of the water fall." Kev said. "It's near the edge."

"The edge? As in, right on the cliff?" Shelly said as she hurried after the two.

"Great..." Bau mumbled miserably.

"It's alright for you. You can just float up. We have to climb." Shelly grumbled as she scratched absenmindedly at a small scratch left by one of the Fuzzies.

"It's through here." Kev paused when the other two gave him a questioning look. "What? I used to wrok here ages ago before it got taken over." He added innocently and carried on through a patch of bushes surrounded by trees at the waterfall's base.

Bau and Shelly followed him and snuck around the back of the false fall.

"This maintainence ladder goes all the way up on the outside. At the top there's a hatche that opens inwards onto the bank of the waterfall's slide top." Kev shouted over the noise of rushing water. "The hatch at the top only openes from this side though, unless you have a key."

"Do you have a key?" Bau replied.

Kev paused a moment, holding onto the bottom rungs of the ladder. "Er, no. All our keyes were taken off us when we were fired."

"Then how're we gonna get down?" Shelly asked, anxiouseness creeping into her voice.

"Well, it is a water slide. And the weather's hardly cold, is it?" He said with a grin and carried on up the ladder.

Shelly rubbed her face. "The weather's getting to my mind." She grumbled and reluctantly followed Kev up. "C'mon Bau! You have our bags!" Shelly called down, urging the ghost to follow.

Bau swallowed hard and started following them up the ladder.

They eventually reached the maintainence hatch at the top and followed Kev through the crawl space where they came out onto a thick patch of damp moss and grass at the top of the waterfall. The roar of water echoed through the waterfall tunnel, mixing with the screams and shouts of joy and excitement as every few seconds, someone was swept by in the current and disappeared over the edge of the fall.

"I swear, everyone around here's mad!" Shelly said, gaping as a blue Shy Guy went over the edge.

Kev wasn't listening to what she was saying. He was listening to the tingling sound, now very close.

Shelly turned her head to face the grey and black Koopa, instantly picking up the sound of raw magic.

"It seems to be comming from beneath that rockery..." She said.

She crept towards it, following the sound, and pulled a few rocks out of the way. She tried moving a larger rock, but she couldn't do it by herself. She called to Kev and Bau to help and within a few seconds it rolled to one side, revealing a golden star, shining brightly.

9 - Chain Chomp's Bath

Shelly slowly picked up the Power Star from its hiding place in the rockery, its shining golden surface sooth and warm in her paws. She felt its raw power vibrating up her arms as she held it and a brief moment of sadness came over her. A part of her wanted to go home, back to her husband. The other part of her wanted to stay here, in the Mushroom Kingdom with Kev and Bau.

"Shelly...." Taunted an eerie voice and she stepped back, almost dropping the Star when an evil face on a sheet of white appeared in front of her.

"Huh!" She squeaked. "What?"

"We gotta get this back to Karmella so's you can go home. Remember? Or are you still lost in dreamland?" The Boo said. "Put it in the bag and let's get going before we get kicked out."

"Ugh, my clothes are soaked!" Shelly said, wringing out the bottom of her shirt.

She'd lost her hair band on the water slide so now her long red curls clung to her face, slowly drying in the afternoon sun.

"At least you don't have water in your shell." Kev grunted as he stopped to wriggle out of his shell, pouring out water as he turned it upside down.

Bau and Shelly laughed and sat down in the grass to rest, but their chatter was soon cut short when the ground started vibrating beneath them. They looked around as the vibrations became stronger, the sound of metal being smashed together, a strange metallic barking filling the silence of the meadows.

"That sounds like a Chain Chomp..." Kev said nervously.

"It doesn't sound too happy..." Shelly said.

"You're right. It ain't happy, and it's coming this way!" Bau said, looking behind at a Chain Chomp cresting the hill, bounding towards them, heat radiating from its red hot body. When it spotted them, it picked up its pace, burying a black track into the ground as it moved.

"Run!" A voice shouted from above. "Run back towards the river!"

The three didn't bother looking up, they just obeyed, turned tail and ran towards the river as fast as they could, the Chain Chomp closing the gap between them.

"The bags!" Kev shouted over the noise, looking over his shoulder.

"Leave them!" Shelly said and grabbed his arm, propelling him forward with her.

She couldn't believe what she'd just said. The Power Star was in one of those bags, she wouldn't be able to get home if it were lost. And what would Karmella say if half her magic were to be destroyed? The bags bounced high into the air as the angry Chain Chomp gained, snapping its mouth shut as the shoulder sacks fell back down, disappearing into the dark innards of the metal beast.

"Get onto the far bank!" The voice shouted again. "You'll be safe there!"

Shelly, Bau and Kev splashed into the water, swimming to the opposite side, hauling themselves up onto the muddy bank panting heavily. They stood frozen to the spot in the grass, watching in horror as the Chain Chomp bounded towards them with angry determination, poised, ready to start running again. The Chain Chomp landed heavily in the water and stopped dead. Its searing red colour darkening to black as the water steamed and hissed.

"It seems... Happier now..." Shelly huffed and Kev and Bau nodded dumbly.

They jumped as a short, plump figure landed in the grass beside them.

"Thankyou for calming down my pet." Beamed a richly dressed female Toad.

"Your... Pet?" Shelly sputtered looking back at the living ball and chain as it wallowed happily in the river.

"It ate our stuff.' Kev said blankly as he watched it.

"Oh dear... I'm terribly sorry. She will spit them out eventually, I promise. She doesn't have a strong stomach." The Toad said reassuringly.

"A Chain Chomp that can't handle what it eats? That's a first." Bau said, trying not to laugh.

The Toad fell silent and looked them over, tsking, slowly shaking her head.

"You three look worn and hungry." She said in a sorrowful tone. "Where are you headed?"

A short pause.

"A small town a few miles south west of here." Bau said.

"Hmm... Yes." The Toad said thoughtfully. "I know where you mean. I'll take you there if you like."

The three looked at each other, then at the Toad and then up at her air ship that now loomed directly above them.

"That would be much appreciated, thankyou." Kev said, smiling.

"Marco!" She shouted suddenly and another Toad landed beside her. "Walk Matilda home, would you? There's a good man."

He approached the Chain Chomp without fuss and calmly brought her out of the water, taking her chain and leading her off in the direction they came.

"She's a big softie really; loves cuddles and attention. Unfortunately, Chain Chomps are notorious for over heating in the summer." She said as a basket was lowered. "Oh forgive me. Where are my manners? I'm Loanna. And you are?" She extended her hand and the three introduced themselves before climbing into the basket.

"First thing I'm gonna do when I get home is board up the doors, windows and fire places." Bau said from across the table on the air ship.

"I think I might just sleep for the next couple of days." Kev said, rubbing his eyes and stifling a yawn.

"What about you Shelly?"

"Uhm..." She sighed as she stared out of the window at the passing clouds. "I dunno. I'm not even sure I want to leave. Come to think of it, I have more going for me here, than I do there. That and I like it here. More so than I do at home with my husband."

Kev and Bau looked at the grey Panther, speechless.

10 - Way Home

The well dressed Toad, Loanna, bustled up to the table by the window where Kev, Bau and Shelly were sat talking quietly.

"I've just got word from Marco that Matilda has spat your bags out. I've asked him to go to the town by pipe with them, so he should be there when we arrive." She said cheerfully.

Relief washed over them and they relaxed for the first time since they boarded the air ship.

"Surely you still wanna go home?" Kev asked after a moment.

"Yeah, when I first met you, you practically begged me to help you get home." Bau added.

Shelly wiped a tear away as it rolled down her cheek, leaving a dark trail of wet grey fur. She had never felt so confused in her life. She had no idea what she wanted to do.

"Honestly? Apart from my husband Lee, you're the only friends I've ever had. Even my parents don't like me. They paid more attention to my sister, and even she said I was a defect. I got called an outcast all the time and the only time anyone was nice to me, was when they wanted something." She said, the words coming freely, as if it didn't matter anymore. "D'you think I'll be able to get back here when I get home? Or is it just a one way thing?"

Kev and Bau shrugged helplessly.

"You'll have to ask Karmella." The Boo said.

The air ship touched down with a bump outside the town, and as promised, Marco was there waiting for them at the main gates. They said their thankyou's and headed into town in search of the MagiKoopa, Karmella. Karmella was in her shop in a quiet, near forgotten corner of the market square, smiling with delight as the grey Panther handed her her Power Star.

"I knew you would get it!" She cackled with glee and placed a heavily ringed hand on Shelly's shoulder.

"It's now time to say goodbye to your friends." She said in a more serious tone.

"Karmella? Will I be able to get back here once I get home?" Shelly asked curiously, the question gnawing at her mind.

Karmella paused, a soft intake of air the only thing to be heard. "Only when you find what you are looking for, will you be able to come and go as you please."

Shelly turned to the misfit Boo and the grey and black Spikey Koopa, both looking miserable, and she hugged them both tightly, whispering her goodbyes through stifled whimpers.

"Remember what Karmella said; If you find it, you'll be able to come back if you don't like it there." Bau said, his words muffled by Shelly's fading red shirt, Kev nodding in agreement.

They turned to Karmella and watched wide eyed as she worked her magic, the Power Star glowing brighter than ever before evaporating into a fine golden mist, sinking into the MagiKoopa's upturned palms.

"Are you ready to return young outcast?" She asked, her voice low. Shelly swallowed hard and nodded hesitantly. "Then, begone with you!" Was the last thing she heard before darkness swallowed her, all noise and senses being dulled to the point of numbness in an instant.

She felt herself coming to, the strong smell of disinfectant stinging her nostrils. A sudden feeling of regret and loneliness flooding her body.

"Bau...? Kev?" She croaked wearily.

She felt a paw on her own and her eyes shot open, bright artificial light piercing her mind like hot lead. She forced her eyes to focus, ignoring the dull headache behind her eyes, and the face of a black Panther loomed over her, its face etched with worry and relief.

"We thought you weren't gonna come to." Lee said raggedly. Shelly felt her throat tighten, a small knot of dread settling in the pit of her stomach.

"We...?" She murmured weakly.

"Your parents and sister are here. They have been since they found out you were in hospital."

Shelly pulled herself out of the hard bed and grabbed the clothes that were hanging over the back of Lee's chair.

"Where're you going?" He asked, standing up.

"Home. I have to find something."

"Not this again, Shelly, we've been through this too many times to count. You're ill, now's not the time to go and start turning the house upside down again." He huffed.

"I'm not ill. I'm perfectly fine thankyouverymuch." She snapped back. "Now, are you gonna drive me home, or do I have to call a cab?"

"Ghosts don't exist Shelly." Lee said as he pulled away from another red light turned green. "Nor do talking mushrooms, living ball and chains or giant living slabs of concrete that demand to be paid. Turtles can't do magic and drain pipes do not warp you to different parts of the country. Get over it Shelly, it was a dream, that's all." Lee growled.

"I told you you wouldn't believe me!" Shelly retorted stubbornly.

Lee shook his head and pulled into the driveway, parking up and switching the engine off before quickly following Shelly into the house. The lights were on and before she could get the key in the door her mum opened it.

"Shelly!" She exclaimed then grunted something under her breath when she pushed past her and got back to searching the house.

Another wave of anger washed over her as she overheard her mother talking with Lee in the hallway. She heard another car pull up outside and soon two more people joined the murmured voices in the hallway where the murmured talk continued. She stood upright when an idea hit her and strode into the hallway where her mother, father, sister and husband were gathered in front of the coat cupboard. They looked at her strangely, their looks accusing her of being mad. She ignored them and pushed them out of the way, opening the cupboard door. A familiar mischevious laugh filled the silence, sending shivers up and down their spines. A grin spread across Shelly's face when a large white ball bounced to her feet. She picked it up, ignoring the stares from her family, smiling back at the familiar grin looking up at her.

"That's one creepy ball." Her sister said.

"A Boo." Shelly chuckled.

"I don't remember seeing that last night." Her mother said.

"I told you I wasn't lying." Shelly said, looking at Lee, who was stood, fixated with the ball.

"Get rid of it. It's disgusting." Her father said, turning his nose up at it.

Shelly shifted her grip on the ball and something rattled inside. She held it up to the light and silhouetted by the bright hallway light and the ball's thin rubbery surface, she saw the outline of a

pendant like the one Bau had found in the crate. She hurried into the kitchen, paying no heed to those around her, pulling a small, sharp knife from one of the drawers, slicing a small cut into the ball, retrieving the silver pendant.

"Wow.. It's beautiful.." Her sister said, looking over her shoulder.

Shelly ignored her and placed it around her neck.

"Shelly...?" Lee said, stepping into the kitchen, her parents close behind him.

She took a deep breath. She didn't feel at home here anymore. Nothing felt right from the start, and now she knew why.

"I'm sorry Lee. I just don't feel comfortable here. I'll see you around, yeah?" She said, smiling, a paw on the pendant, a faint glow leaking from between her fingers, quickly enveloping her in a white light leaving her family stood in the kitchen, watching the spot where she used to be.

END