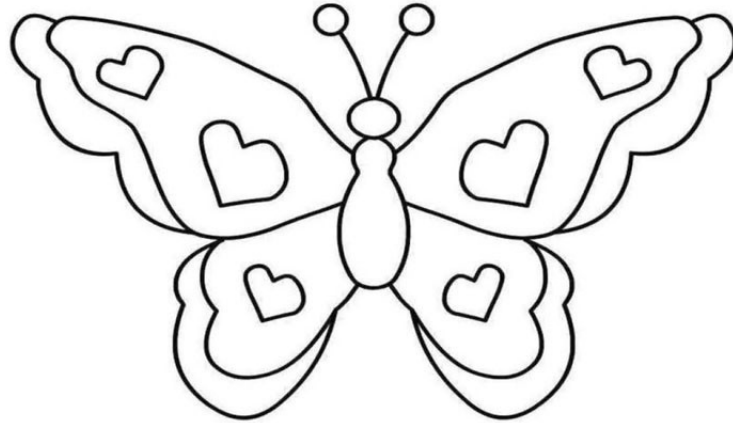




Fun with Grandma

Petite Breaux

For Nariyah (as you requested), Delloid (DJ), Deven (Tunde) and Kam'rynn (Kami) – the loves of my heart – no matter how near or far – MommaD will always love you.

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Introduction

The grandchildren will be visiting Grandmamma Dalila for one week this summer in Sweet Home Alabama. They will be flying in from Georgia, Florida, and Texas. Ariyah the oldest is 11, Dillon 8, Neved, and Imani both 7 years old.

With Grandmamma Dalila, there is always so much fun, where imaginations run free, and anything can happen. So, come along for the ride, as you read all about their fun with grandma!

Chapter 1

THE PLANE HAS LANDED

The day had finally arrived. Grandmamma Dalila sang out with excitement.

♪♪ “I am so EXCITED and I just can’t hide it! I’m about to lose control and I think I like it.” ♪♪

Her grandchildren would be arriving in just a few hours and she needed to get to the airport in order to pick them up. Much of the morning had been spent running around in dizzy circles getting their rooms ready and planning their adventurous holiday that they would spend with their grandmother.

It had been quite some time since she had last seen her grandchildren and she was sure they would be feeling as excited, but as overwhelmed, as she was. She certainly didn’t want to be late in fetching them.

She grabbed the keys for her old SUV, briefly looked around at the house ensuring that everything was in order, and then hastily shot out of the front door.

Grandmamma Dalila rushed into the garage, pointed the remote at the big rusty SUV with the over-sized truck tires. HMMMMMMM the little motor hummed as it released the access ladder that was safely stored under the SUV. Grandmamma Dalila stretched her short little legs as high as she could and carefully climbed up the wobbly ladder. She waddled like a duck as she settled behind the huge steering wheel.

UNNNNNNT UNNNNNNT UNNNNNNT. The SUV spluttered as Grandmamma turned the key in the ignition. Again, she tried.

UNNNNNNT UNNNNNNT UNNNNNNT. With every tick of the clock, Grandmamma Dalila became more anxious. “What to do? What to do?” she scratched her head in a panic. “I’ll just have to get out the three-wheeler motorcycle with the sidecar.”

But as Grandmamma Dalila started preparing her new mode of transport, she realized that there would surely be too much luggage. She would have to hitch up the old wagon.

With a loud BOOM, the garage spat out the three-wheeler with Grandmamma Dalila perched comfortably on the padded seat. In the shadows, a little mouse coughed and rubbed his eyes. But Grandmamma Dalila had one thing on her mind and that was to get to the airport to collect her grandchildren.

She zoomed up the highway with the wind hitting her face and the old wagon swinging from side to side. She hadn’t felt this happy in a long time. She yelled, “Yes! Go girl! You’ve got this!”



The three-wheeler finally skidded to a halt after having circled the parking garage at the airport looking for a safe spot. Tick tock, tick tock! With every second that ticked away, Grandmamma Dalila could feel her heart beating in her throat. She really wished the airport were not as crowded as it was. She was running out of time. Surely the children's planes had already landed.

Ariyah and Dillon were in fact waiting and Grandmamma Dalila could see them standing at the end of the long passage. In her haste to get to them, she skidded across the freshly polished floor almost knocking the porter off his feet. "Slow down! No running!" he glared at Grandmamma Dalila, but she just kept on running; nothing was going to stop her, certainly not a talking lizard!

By the time she reached the children, her heart pounded DA DUNT DA DUNT DA DUNT! "Ariyah! Dillon!" She gasped, frantically throwing her arms around them. This was the moment she had been waiting for.

"Hey! Grandmamma!" Ariyah and Dillon smothered Grandmamma Dalila with hugs and kisses. Dillon could not wait to tell Grandmamma Dalila that the most exciting part of his flight

was looking down at the clouds.

“They looked like marshmallows, Grandmamma! Big, white, and spongy!”

Ariyah was unimpressed and interrupted, “Well, I listened to music the whole time. Dillon was getting on my nerves asking so many questions.”

“Oh, Ariyah! Dillon was just excited, that's all. You have to learn to be patient with your little brother. He has never been on a plane. You are the lucky one, as you have.”

Ariyah knew that Grandmamma Dalila wouldn't understand that she was getting a big girl, and Dillon seemed to be becoming a nuisance. He seemed to ask so many questions and would never be satisfied with the answers she gave to him.

“Grandmamma Dalila, you know when the plane first took off it went faster and faster. Then we were pushed back into our seats as the plane lifted up into the sky. And then, I heard DUNT DUNT under the plane. I got such a fright, but the man said it was the wheels making the noise!” Dillon's big eyes were twinkling with excitement.

“And then, just before we landed I heard that same DUNT DUNT under the plane and then we hit a big bump! I was scared, Grandmamma, so I closed my eyes really tight. But when I opened them, we were on the ground. I asked Ariyah what it was that made that awful sound, but she did not answer me.”

“That's because you are so annoying, Dillon!” Ariyah snapped.

“Now, now, Ariyah! Dillon has an enquiring mind. It is good that he asks lots of questions. That is how we all learn.”

Ariyah felt embarrassed, but soon forgot about Grandmamma Dalila's scolding when she saw Imani waiting at the next gate.

Ariyah let go of Grandmamma's hand and started to run towards her cousin. “Be careful, Ariyah. Don't disappear in the crowds!” Grandmamma Dalila called after her. Dillon felt quite satisfied when, in a flash, Ariyah had disappeared amongst the sea of people ahead of them. Grandmamma

Dalila took a firm hold of his hand and as she ran after Ariyah, Dillon felt himself being dragged along.

“I said, DON'T run!” scowled the talking lizard. Dillon skidded to a halt, jolting Grandmamma backwards. “Did you see that?” Dillon looked shocked. “That porter just spoke to you, Grandmamma!” Dillon had turned pale. He was sure that something was very strange about the porter.

“Oh, don't take any notice of the porter, Dillon. He is a bit of a party pooper. He seems to get annoyed with people running in the airport building. I don't know why,” Grandmamma Dalila frowned.

“No! Grandmamma Dalila! The porter... e...he...he's a lizard!”

Grandmamma winked at Dillon, took his hand and led him through the crowds to Ariyah, who had by that stage reached Imani.

KADINK, KADINK, KADINK, the steady sound of luggage wheels hitting the tiles on the floor drowned out the squeals of delight when Imani saw her family. Ariyah had reached her first and wasted no time in throwing her arms around Imani. Grandmamma Dalila and Dillon

patiently waited their turn and then they too smothered her with kisses.

Dillon could not wait to ask Imani about the clouds, but in the back of his mind, he thought the clouds were nothing in comparison to the talking lizard he had seen.

“Did you see the clouds, Imani?” “I didn’t see the clouds, Dillon. I fell asleep,” Imani yawned, finding it rather difficult to keep her eyes open.

“You slept the whole time, Imani?” asked Grandmamma Dalila, who seemed concerned about her. She hoped she wasn’t getting sick.

“Yes ma’am.”

“Girl! That must have been a looooooong sleep! I guess you were very tired.” Grandmamma Dalila laughed heartily; sure, that Imani was just exhausted.

“Time to pick up Neved, kids. He’ll be arriving any moment now.” Grandmamma Dalila instructed Ariyah to hold onto Dillon’s one hand. Safely tucked into Grandmamma Dalila’s one hand was Dillon’s other sticky little hand, and Imani grabbed tightly onto Grandmamma’s free hand.

The four weaved their way through the crowds, pushing, pulling, swerving, walking faster, and slowing down, until they reached the gate where they expected Neved would be.

“There’s the little man!” Grandmamma Dalila shouted seeing Neved struggling to keep up with the flight attendant. “I’m Neved’s grandmother. Thank you for taking care of him.”

Ariyah had been waiting patiently. She could not contain her excitement any longer. She grabbed Neved and hugged him. She smothered him with wet kisses, telling him how much she missed him. Neved just laughed, and assured Ariyah that he too had missed her terribly. Dillon couldn’t wait to ask Neved if he had seen the fluffy white clouds and Ariyah just raised her eyebrows, scowling at him, “You, and those clouds!”

Dillon glared at Ariyah, “Wait till I tell them about the talking lizard,” he thought.

“What did you do on the plane, Neved? Were you scared,” Dillon asked.

“I wasn’t scared. I played games on my Nabi,” Neved answered.

All Grandmamma Dalila’s grandchildren were together at last. “Group hug! Group hug!” Neved shouted. It was time to collect the luggage and make their way home.

“Ow!” Dillon heard. Sure that he had trodden on Neved’s toe, he turned to apologize to him. Neved had also heard the loud shout of pain, and he too had turned around.

“Whose toe did I tread on?” asked Dillon.

“Not mine,” responded Neved. The boys looked at each other. Something strange was happening.

“You should really look where you are walking!” a grumpy voice traveled up from the floor. Dillon peered down at his shoes. It certainly appeared that Dillon’s shoe was talking to him. Neved looked at Dillon and Dillon looked at Neved. Grandmamma Dalila, Ariyah and Imani were too busy sharing stories about the flight that they did not notice anything strange was happening. It was only when Dillon asked Grandmamma Dalila if they could stop for a moment that she asked if he was alright.

“Grandmamma Dalila, something very strange is happening. Just a few minutes ago, I saw a talking lizard. Now, it appears that my shoe is talking!”

“Oh dear,” Grandmamma Dalila gasped. “I was afraid that you would find out before I got a chance to tell you all. Now, there is nothing to worry about. It all started a while back when I was watching my favorite program on the television. The electricity seemed to trip and all the lights in the neighborhood went out. I tried everything to restore the power, but nothing seemed to work. I finally gave up. To my surprise, the television just came back on all on its own. The only thing was, all the characters that were on the television program at the time of it switching off, came alive. They crept through every crack and space and before I knew it, there were these magical adventure creatures everywhere. It certainly seems that this extra-ordinary event happened throughout my neighborhood. Well, it seems these creatures have come to stay. They have made themselves quite comfortable and I have been awfully impressed with the way they have tried to fit in. They have even tried to get jobs, live in well-kept homes, and try their hardest to fit in. I think they are actually more scared of us than we are of them.”

“Oh, I’ve heard that before, Grandmamma. My teacher always says not to hurt bees as they are more scared of me than I am of them,” explained Ariyah.

“I ask that you all try and make these creatures feel welcome. So, Dillon, have you lifted your shoe to see what it is that shouted at you?”

With that, Dillon cautiously lifted his foot. Under his shiny black shoe was what looked like a long piece of string. Neved knelt down and cautiously picked up the string only to discover that on the one end were two big round eyes.

“Thank you for picking me up, young man. I was sure to get squashed with all the feet that are walking through the airport today. Please could you place me on the handrail where I will not be trodden on.”

Stunned by the piece of talking string, Neved careful placed him on the handrail. Dillon and Neved would sure have some stories to tell their school friends when they got home.

The luggage terminal was filling up quickly and Grandmamma pushed the children to the front of the queue. She told them to grab their bags from off the carousel as soon as they could, but to be careful that they did not get their hands stuck in the rubber flaps that guided the suitcases along the conveyer belt.

A low UNNNNNNNNN sound rumbled louder and louder. Sitting on the edge of the carousel was a rather round ginger cat trying really hard to control the luggage as it came flying out of the chute. Neved and Dillon were so intrigued by this strange cat that they did not notice their suitcase coming out. Ariyah shouted at Dillon, but it was too late, the suitcases had already moved too far away. They would have to wait for them to travel the full circle of the carousel before they could grab them.

Finally, all the children had managed to retrieve their luggage. The day was slipping away and Grandmamma Dalila was anxious to get home.

“Come along, children. It is time to make our way to the three-wheeler. We have a rather adventurous trip home.”

Chapter 2

GRANDMAMMA'S HOUSE WE GO

When they finally found Grandmamma Dalila's three-wheeler, Dillon looked at it and then turned to Grandmamma Dalila in amazement. How were they all going to fit with their luggage?

"Well, if we squeeze together really tightly, we can fit two of you on the seat with me and two of you in the sidecar. We will tie the luggage down on the trailer," Grandmamma replied.

Ariyah hopped onto the three-wheeler and snuggled up close behind Grandmamma. Neved hopped in behind Ariyah, and Dillon and Imani squashed into the sidecar.

"This is cool huh, Dillon?" asked Imani.

"Yeah! Grandmamma Dalila, don't lose us. Can this seat come off?" Dillon asked looking rather worried.

"It can, Dillon, but only when I take it off. But you don't need to worry. I have tied it on really tight. You are safe," Grandmamma Dalila assured the children. "Are you all comfortable?"

"YEAH!" yelled all the children.

Grandmamma Dalila hit a big red button that pulled a big visor over the three-wheeler. This was sure to protect the children from the harsh winds.

Heading back down the road to Grandmamma's house, the streets had become somewhat empty and Grandmamma Dalila wondered if all the adventure creatures were hiding. "Goodness! I wonder where they all are," Grandmamma thought out loud. The children heard a mumble. The noise of the wind hitting the visor was so loud.

And just when the children thought the noise in their ears could not get any louder, Grandmamma Dalila turned on her CD player attached to the sidecar and the music pumped out.

♪♪ "Ain't no mountain high enough..." ♪♪ Grandmamma Dalila sang out loud along with the lyrics of the song. She pointed to Ariyah, "Ain't no mountain high enough. Ain't no river wide enough. Ain't no valley low enough, to keep me away from you, babe" ♪♪

Ariyah smiled while bobbing her head along with the music. She could feel the warmth of Grandmamma's love as she sang. Ariyah opened her mouth and in a loud and beautiful voice she began to sing along, ♪♪ "Ain't no mountain high enough. Ain't no river wide enough, to keep me away from you, Grandmamma Dalila!" ♪♪ Pointing at Dillon, she said, "Sing it, Dillon."

Dillon didn't know the words of the song, so he just hummed the tune, filling in the very few words he managed to pick up, ♪♪ "Ain't noooooo valllley." ♪♪ They all burst out laughing. As they continued up the road towards home singing on the tops of their voices, Grandmamma Dalila was sure she had not felt this happy in a long time. And it was very clear that her grandchildren felt as happy as she did.

"Faster, Grandmamma Dalila, faster!" Imani was over her fear of being disconnected from the

three-wheeler and was enjoying watching the trees flash by.

Grandmamma Dalila gripped the gearshift trigger and pressed the gas hard. They roared along the highway leaving a trail of smoke behind them.

The song came to an end and before the next one could start, Ariyah heard frantic coughing coming from behind them.

“Grandmamma Dalila!” Ariyah shouted, trying to get Grandmamma Dalila’s attention. “There is someone coughing. And it sounds like they are in the trailer with the luggage!”

“Imani! Dillon! I need for you to try and turn around and see if you can find out who is coughing in the trailer.”

Dillon craned his head as far around as he could possibly get it. He rubbed his eyes. He could not believe what he was seeing.

“Grandmamma Dalila! There is a tortoise sitting on top of the luggage in the trailer! He is wearing goggles, Grandmamma Dalila. And he has a top hat on his head!”

“Hahahahahahaha!” Grandmamma Dalila chuckled. “That’s just Timothy Tortoise. You are going to meet a lot of new friends on this holiday, Dillon. Best you get used to them.”



Timothy Tortoise eventually stopped coughing, once the smoke from the exhaust pipe had stopped pelting out. The music had come to an end, Grandmamma Dalila was navigating the turns in the road and the excitement of the day had finally caught up with the children. They all fell silent, exhausted, but thoroughly content and happy.

Finally, Dillon broke the silence, "Are we there yet?"

"Almost there, Dillon," Grandmamma Dalila replied. "And when we get home, I want you to all have a good rest once we have unpacked. Tomorrow is going to be a busy day."

"What are we doing tomorrow?" Ariyah asked. "We are going to be heading to the zoo. I think you might see some wonderful creatures there." "Yesss!" Dillon forgot about his exhaustion and couldn't wait to see what the next day held for them all.

Chapter 3

UNLOAD UNWIND AND RELAX

Everything in Grandmamma Dalila's neighborhood had changed. Ariyah looked around in astonishment. She hadn't remembered seeing the strange houses and shiny castles the last time she visited. "Is this your neighborhood, Grandmamma Dalila?"

"Yeah! It is," Grandmamma Dalila answered. "Don't you remember it?"

Ariyah shook her head. Everything looked so different.

"We will spend a whole day riding bikes around the neighborhood. That way you might get to meet some of my new neighbors. Remember those strange creatures you met at the airport and Timothy Tortoise? Well some of them live right here in my neighborhood. They don't come out too often because they don't trust us yet and I think they are a little afraid of the humans," said Grandmamma Dalila.

"So they live right here, Grandmamma Dalila? Right next to your house?" asked Imani.

"Yes, they sure do and I try to make them feel welcome and you should do the same. They need a friend just as you do," replied Grandmamma Dalila.

It had been a long drive home from the airport, and at last, Grandmamma Dalila turned into the driveway, pressed a blue remote button that raised the garage door and pulled the three-wheeler into the garage.

"Nobody moves until I have completely turned the wheeler off. Ariyah, you and Neved hop off first, then Dillon and Imani hop out of the side car and then I will unload the luggage.

The children pulled their suitcases along the garden path and carried their tablets, which they thought they would bring in case they got bored at Grandmamma Dalila's house. There was no chance of that happening though; Grandmamma Dalila had a full fun-packed holiday planned for her grandchildren. Running backwards and forwards, they carted more and more luggage and pillows until the little wagon attached to the three-wheeler was empty. It sighed in relief having gotten rid of its heavy load.

The sun was slowly starting to set and the sky was turning a beautiful shade of purple. After placing their bags in their rooms, Grandmamma Dalila instructed the children to wash their hands and to report to the kitchen as soon as they were done. She busied herself cooking up the most delicious meal; she was sure her grandchildren were as hungry as she.

And the children did not disappoint Grandmamma Dalila. They picked up their knives and forks, after giving thanks for the food, and started shoveling the strange looking meal into their hungry mouths.

"I've never seen orange spaghetti, Grandmamma," said Neved with his cheeks stuffed full of food, "and these saucy meatballs are the tastiest I have ever eaten!" The red ketchup dripped

from the corners of his mouth.

CLINK, CLUNK, CLANK, the sound of utensils scraping plates to get the last possible delicious morsel into their wide open mouths echoed around the kitchen. Finally, Grandmamma Dalila broke into laughter.

“My goodness! I have not seen such hungry little children in a very long time. It is so good to have you all here with me at last. It has been a long day and I think it is time to wash up, brush our teeth, and head for bed. We are all going to need a good rest if we are going to enjoy the zoo tomorrow.”



“The zoo!” squealed Imani in delight. She could not remember ever going to a zoo. Besides, Grandmamma Dalila had promised the children that this was no ordinary zoo.

Neved and Dillon were to sleep in Grandmamma Dalila’s spare bedroom. There was a big double bed with a warm feather comforter they would share. Imani and Ariyah would climb into Grandmamma Dalila’s extra-large bed. This was always Ariyah’s favorite time of the day. She loved to jump into Grandmamma Dalila’s bed, snuggle up close to her, and listen to the many

stories this wise old grandmother told.

Grandmamma Dalila lead Dillon and Neved to their room, and after pulling the comforter right up under their noses, she kissed each grandson, told them how much she loved them and walked out through the door.

CLICK! The light switch groaned as Grandmamma Dalila pressed it. The boys lay in the pitch-blackness of the room and Dillon thought it weird that he could not tell the difference between having his eyes open or closed. Dillon and Neved chuckled and whispered frantically to each other sharing their wishes they had for their holiday. They certainly did not feel like sleeping, but the excitement of the day had caught up with them and it was not long before the two little boys were fast asleep.

In her own room, Grandmamma Dalila made sure Imani and Ariyah were warm enough and that they had sufficient space in the big bed. She gave each little girl a kiss and wished them sweet dreams before turning out the light.

“We have a big day ahead of us tomorrow. Close your eyes and have sweet dreams, my angels. There is no time for stories tonight, Ariyah.”

“Grandmamma...why do my eyes burn?” Imani rubbed her tired little eyes.

Grandmamma Dalila just smiled. She knew that the Sandman had made his rounds. Every night, when the lights went out, this invisible tiny little elf would fly around the neighborhood dropping sleeping dust into all the children’s eyes.

Chapter 4

LET'S GO TO THE ZOO

“Okay!” shouted Grandmamma Dalila. “Time to get up. It’s zoo day. Get up! Say your prayers, get dressed, brush your teeth, wash your faces, make up your beds, and come eat breakfast.” Grandmamma Dalila was anxious to get going and needed the children to get ready with the morning routine.

Ariyah turned over and pulled the covers over her head. She moaned and groaned, “It’s too early, Grandmamma Dalila.”

“I am up. I have been up since early this morning watching TV,” Imani said. “I was hoping some more of the adventure characters would jump out at me, like they did for you, Grandmamma.”

If they were going to get the day started, Grandmamma would have to get Ariyah up. She sat on the edge of the bed and lifted the covers off Ariyah’s face. Grandmamma whispered in her ear, “You are going to the zoo with us today, Ariyah,” Grandmamma Dalila chanted, slipping her hand under the blankets and tickling Ariyah till the tears of laughter streamed down her face.

Imani was sent in to wake up the boys. She couldn’t wait to pounce on them and give them a fright. She turned the doorknob slowly and peeked into the room so she could ease into the room quietly without the boys noticing her. Dillon and Neved were still fast asleep and Imani could hear them breathing deeply. Imani squeaked with excitement and leaped onto the bed, grabbed a pillow and swung it back and forth hitting both boys on the head as she yelled, “Get up! Grandmamma Dalila said get up, brush your teeth, wash your face, and get dressed so we can eat and go to the zoo!” She was out of breath and her arms were tiring from swinging the pillow.

“Stop, Imani!” Neved struggled to speak because he was laughing so much. Dillon was still underneath the covers and bravely mumbled, “She can’t get me! That pillow doesn’t hurt.”

But it was when Imani warned them both that if they did not get up she would fetch a cup of water from the bathroom and throw it on the both of them, that the boys shot out of the bed laughing.

Grandmamma Dalila could hear the commotion coming from the boys’ room and shouted from the kitchen, “Is everyone getting dressed? Breakfast is about ready. C’m on to the table when you done brushing your teeth. Stop messing around now.”

Trying to outrun one another, the children ran towards the kitchen. It sounded like a herd of elephants coming down the passage. The old wooden floor creaked in disagreement and so did Grandmamma Dalila, “Stop that running in here before you break something!”

The bacon, grits, pancakes and biscuits made the children’s mouths water. Ariyah remembered eating Grandmamma’s delicious breakfasts the last time she visited. She found it

difficult to choose what to eat, so she decided just to have a bit of everything. Grandmamma Dalila just chuckled. She had never seen children eat so much!

*****The zoo was a mile away from Grandmamma's house, so it would take just a few minutes' drive to get there. However, first Grandmamma had to get the old rusty SUV started. She remembered that the day before it had just refused to start.

All the children were safely buckled into their seats and Grandmamma was firmly placed behind the steering wheel.

"Now children, we need to all ask old SUV to please start."

Imani sang, "Please, Mr. SUV. Please will you start for Grandmamma and me."

Everyone laughed not for one moment thinking that the SUV would listen to Imani. But when Grandmamma turned the key in the ignition:

UNNNNTUNNNNTUNNNNT...

BRRRRRRRRMMMMMMMM.

"Yay!" they all shouted. "The SUV listened, Grandmamma!"

Dillon bounced up and down with excitement, "I cannot wait to get to the zoo."

All the way, the old SUV hopped and jumped along the road and Grandmamma Dalila could hear her grandchildren excitedly sharing what they planned to see at the zoo.

"I want to ride the camel," squealed Ariyah. Dillon interrupted, "I want to see the gorillas!" Neved thought that the ride to the zoo in Grandmamma's old SUV felt very much like the ride he had had on the bumper cars at the fun fair in his hometown. "Why does the SUV jump and hop so much, Grandmamma?"

"Because it is as excited as we are, Neved. This rusty old man hasn't been out for a drive in quite some time."

Dillon shook his head. He thought it strange that Grandmamma Dalila spoke to her SUV as if it were a human. But then again, there were stranger things he had seen since he arrived.

Finally, Grandmamma pulled into a parking spot right close to the zoo entrance gate. "Don't you all go and run off now!" she warned the children. "Before we walk around in the hot sun, I want to smear some sunscreen on your little bodies to make sure the harsh old sun doesn't burn your sensitive skins."

One by one, the children had their turn to get covered in white cream. Ariyah was adamant that she was a big girl and that she could put her own cream on her face.

"Well, be careful you don't get it into your eyes, Ariyah. It will burn," Grandmamma Dalila warned.

"Eeeek!" Ariyah screamed. "I warned you, Ariyah."

However, it wasn't the cream that was burning her eyes that made Ariyah squeal. Sammy Silver Fox had been standing some way off watching the children's faces turn a silver white once the cream had been smeared on. This fascinated him, so he decided to take a few steps closer.

"Grandmamma!" Ariyah shouted. "There is a fox and I think he has escaped from his cage! He is grinning at me as if he would like to eat me!"



Grandmamma Dalila chuckled. She had not seen Sammy Silver Fox in quite some time. He wasn't one of the animals in the zoo. He was one of the adventure creatures to jump out from the television. After calming Ariyah down and explaining to her that Sammy had no intention of eating her, they all held hands and made their way to the front ticket booth. Grandmamma Dalila paid for their tickets and then the children heard a loud CLICK and the gate opened permitting them to walk through.

"What do you guys want to see first?" Grandmamma asked.

"Let's just go in and see what's in there first," suggested Ariyah, who was still feeling a little shaken after her encounter with Sammy Silver Fox.

The children walked past the reptiles. Dillon loved this section of the zoo. There were snakes, lizards sticking their tongues in and out and some frogs making a noise. RIBBITT RIBBITT.

Imani shouted, "Whoa! That is a big snake! I wouldn't want it to get hold of me."

Dillon agreed that the snake was really scary and Grandmamma Dalila explained that it was a Python. It could wrap itself around its prey and squeeze it to death. She advised the children to

rather stay away from it. Dillon frowned and quickly moved away from the front of the line.

They all quickly moved towards the exit that led outside. But Neved wanted to turn back. Did that Python just smile? He was sure it did.

The ducks and flamingos were on the sidewalk just walking around chatting with one another. Dillon started to walk on faster imitating the waddle of the ducks. He tucked his hands underneath the pit of his underarms with his elbows sticking out and he started flapping his arms up and down. His legs wobbled in and out, as he waddled down the sidewalk making duck sounds, “Quack! Quack!”

Neved joined in, “Quack quack quack!” All the ducks heard the boys making a noise and they came out from all directions and followed Dillon and Neved. One rather strange little duck waddled up alongside Dillon and asked, “So, what zoo do you come from? What kind of duck are you?”

Rather taken aback, Dillon replied, “Are you talking? Are you talking to me? A duck that talks? Wait a minute, are you for real? Grandmamma Dalila! Hurry! Come over here quickly! This duck is talking to me,” shouted Dillon.

Huffing and puffing, Grandmamma Dalila finally caught up with the boys. She had lost sight of them when they had run off. Ariyah and Imani were close on Grandmamma’s heels. “What do you mean the duck spoke to you?” Grandmamma Dalila did not know that the animals in the zoo could talk. She was sure that it was just the adventure characters that came m out of her television that were magical.

“Talk, Duck! Talk!” Dillon instructed, but the duck refused.

“No way! The duck wasn’t talking, Dillon.”

Dillon felt a little offended that Grandmamma did not believe him. After all, Grandmamma had told him that there were magical adventure creatures that had come out her television. So, why could the talking duck not have been one of them? Grandmamma seemed to be in an awful hurry to catch the train to take a trip around the zoo, so Dillon had to give up trying to get the duck to talk and run along to catch up with the others.

CHOOO CHOOO CHOOO the little blue and red train ground to a slow stop at the station and Leonard Lizard, the Station master blew his shiny whistle. The children seemed to have gotten used to these strange creatures popping up here and there and barely took any notice of Leonard. They stood in a straight line waiting for their turn to climb into the passenger coach.

“All aboard...toot toot!” Leonard shouted. And with a jolt, the train pulled away. As it chugged along around the tracks, the children saw giraffes, elephants and even some hippos swimming in a pond. One of the friendlier elephants lifted his trunk and made a loud trumpeting noise and then squirted water at the train. Everyone swayed to the one side of the passenger coach to avoid getting wet. With that, the wheels of the coach moaned and the little carriage leaned dangerously on its side. The children all squealed, but it wasn’t long and the carriage bumped back down onto all of its wheels.

“Look! Grandmamma Dalila, the elephant is running alongside the train,” Neved was so excited. “Will you give me a ride around the zoo, Mr. Elephant?”

“I will be happy to,” bellowed Mr. Elephant as he ran after the train.

Eventually the train came to a stop on the other side of the zoo where the monkeys, lions and the camels were. Mr. Elephant was waiting for Neved and the other children to get off the train. They ran to where Mr. Elephant was waiting and one at a time, they scrambled up his thick grey trunk, over his head and settled down on his back.

“Wee!” shouted Neved, “It is so high up here!” Bumpety bumpety bumpety, the children rocked from side to side while Mr. Elephant took them on a grand tour, stopping alongside the monkeys’ enclosure. Imani thought it looked like a small jungle and she had to strain her eyes in order to see the monkeys. Mr. Elephant told the children to sit quietly and it wasn’t long before the whole jungle seemed to come alive. Monkeys were jumping from branch to branch and sitting in the corner was a huge silver gorilla rubbing his tummy. Under a massive old tree sat a funny looking Orangutan picking his nose.

“Eew!” shouted Neved, “That’s just gross! Rather let us go see the camels!”

“All righty!” trumpeted Mr. Elephant, “Off we go!”

And with a bumpety bumpety bump, the children swayed to and fro with the rhythm of Mr. Elephant’s walk. In the distance, the children could see the humps of the camels. With every step Mr. Elephant took, they got closer and closer and the children became more and more excited.

“This is the last stop for me. I have to get back to the other side before the zookeeper notices I am gone. Have fun kids,” greeted Mr. Elephant after he had dropped them off at the camels’ pen.

“Bye, Mr. Elephant, and thank you!” the children chorused. “Grandmamma, have you got tickets for all of us?” Ariyah was worried that maybe Grandmamma had forgotten that she too wanted to ride the camels. But Grandmamma Dalila would never forget about Ariyah.

“Of course, Ariyah. I have tickets for everyone. We are all going to ride the camels.”

They stood in pairs in a line waiting for their turn. Standing with his back towards them was a rather short, but strange looking man. When he turned around, Dillon screamed, “Grandmamma! Look who is in charge of the camel rides!”

Staring at the children was Peter Penguin. From behind, he looked like a man wearing a black and white suit. But when he faced the children, he was clearly not a man. Peter Penguin waddled up to the children. Around the one end of a rope was Peter’s fin and on the other end was the neck of a camel.

“Who’s riding?” grunted Peter Penguin. “Neved and me,” said Dillon. He felt really foolish talking to a penguin but realized that this was no ordinary penguin. Whatever Peter told them to do, the boys would obey. Peter looked very strict and was a no nonsense kind of guy. Grandmamma Dalila warned the boys to hold on tight.

Bumpily, bumpily, bumpily. “Whoa!”shoutedtheboys,“This is a rough ride!”

“Look!” scolded Camila Camel, “Do you think I like riding people around all day? My back aches!”

“Who said that?” ask Neved. They both look around confused. By that stage the second camel had come to the podium where the girls were standing waiting patiently for their turn. Once again, the man with his back to the girls turned out to be a penguin.

He chirped out the question, “Who is riding?” “We all are!”

Grandmamma Dalila, Imani and Ariyah carefully climbed onto the camel's back and with a bumpily, bumpily, bumpily, they jiggled from right to left, up and down. This wasn't the most comfortable ride. Grandmamma could feel her tummy wobbling.

The ride was over and Grandmamma was pleased to feel the ground beneath her feet. She had had enough of riding on the backs of animals and all the jolting around had made her quite hungry. She was sure that her grandchildren were also starving. "We'll find a nice patch of soft green grass to sit on. I have packed us a basket full of delicious food. We can have a picnic in the shade of one of these beautiful big trees."

Grandmamma spread out the little blanket she had packed and lovingly gave each of her grandchildren a hotdog, which she had made before they had left home.

"Ketchup anyone?"

Tummies full and legs rested, Dillon realized they had not as yet seen the lions. So Grandmamma lead her grandchildren to the lions' den.

"He looks like a big rock just lying there, Grandmamma," complained Dillon. Somehow, the lion didn't look as scary as the ones he had seen on television.

But then the big male lion opened his mouth wide and let out the meanest and deepest roar Dillon had ever heard.

"I've had enough, Grandmamma. Please can we go," Dillon's eyes were as big as dinner plates. When Grandmamma took his hand, she could feel that he was shaking like a leaf.

"Are you afraid, Dillon?" Grandmamma asked. However, of course, Dillon could not tell Grandmamma that the male lion had frightened him. Not in front of Neved, at any rate.

"Come along, kids. It is starting to get late. We need to make our way to the exit gate. Maybe we will see the zebras on our way."

"How did the zebra get its stripes?" Ariyah wondered.

Dillon was sure that someone magical came along every night while they were asleep and painted their stripes on them, but Grandmamma just laughed.

The exit gate was a welcome relief for Grandmamma. Her legs ached and she badly needed to sit. She was very thankful to reach the old rusty SUV and to climb up behind the steering wheel.

"All on board?" Grandmamma Dalila called. "All on board!" the children responded.

"How about pizza for dinner?" "Yay yay yay! Can we go to Chuck E Cheese?"

Chapter 5

CHUCK E CHEEEEEESE!

Grandmamma Dalila drove as fast as the old SUV could go. They were all starving after a busy hot day at the zoo and there was no time to waste. Boink! The children bumped their heads as the car jumped over the bumps. Swoosh! The children fell over on top of each other as Grandmamma took the corner. One more quick turn to the left and the squeal of tires and they would almost be there. In the distance, the children could see the Chuck E Cheese sign all lit up. Vroom! Grandmamma Dalila put her foot down hard on the gas and the old SUV shot down the last stretch of the road.

“If anyone sees an empty spot for me to park in, shout out loud,” Grandmamma called out. She dashed through the parking lot and the children’s heads bobbed from left to right looking for a parking space.

“I see one! There, Grandmamma Dalila! Right there! There’s a spot!” yelled Neved choking on the words.

“I can see it, Neved.” Grandmamma Dalila whipped the car to the right straight into the empty spot, put the car in park, and turned off the engine, “Let’s head inside for some food!”

All the SUV’s doors shot open and everybody jumped out. Thump! Thump! Thump! Thump! The old SUV’s doors slammed shut.

Chucky Cheese was simply the best place Grandmamma Dalila could have taken the children. Not only could they not wait for the delicious pizzas, but they were so excited at the possibility of actually seeing Chucky Cheese himself and getting a chance to play all the games.

Grandmamma gave the children special game tokens and Dillon wasted no time heading for the skeeball. He was really good at that game.

Neved preferred to play basketball and he managed to shoot quite a number of balls through the hoop. “Look at me, Grandmamma Dalila!” yelled Neved. “I’m winning. Just like Dillon!”

“So you are! Nev, you are a star!” Grandmamma and the girls decided to leave the boys playing games and to go and order the pizzas. “We would like to order two large pizzas, salad, and five sodas please,” Grandmamma asked the waitress.

“Sure, Ma’am,” was the response.

“Imani, you go and call Neved and Dillon. Tell them the pizza will be served shortly.”

Soon all four grandchildren and Grandmamma Dalila were sitting comfortably at the table and the waitress brought the order. Dillon’s eyes widened! He could not believe the size of the pizzas.

Clonk! Imani dropped her knife on the floor. Grandmamma Dalila had to bend down to pick it up. Stretching her arm as far as she could, she finally grabbed hold of it and sat up straight

again. But by then, five slices of pizza were missing from the plate. Grandmamma Dalila looked around at the the table, her eyes passing over the faces of each of her grandchildren.

Dillon's and Neved's cheeks were puffed up. They looked like two little chipmunks who had stolen all the nuts.

"Ah ha!" shouted Grandmamma Dalila. "So you two have eaten the pizza!" But Grandmamma Dalila's smile indicated that she was not in the least annoyed with the boys.

She assured the girls that there was still more than enough food for them all and they would not go hungry. She then giggled at her two obviously starving young grandsons and just shook her head.

The Chucky music started playing loud and Chucky came dancing out. He was snapping his fingers in time with the music, which got the children swaying this way and that. They bobbed up and down on their seats and eventually they just could not sit any longer.

They stood up and started dancing and snapping their fingers along with the music, copying Chuck E's moves.

"Hey, Chuck E! Over here, Chuck E!" Neved shouted.

Boogey! Boogey! Boogey! The children swayed their hips and wiggled their legs. They were having such fun with Chuck E.

Huffing and puffing, Imani said, "You know that there is someone in that suit. It's not really Chuck E."

Chuck E heard what Imani said and he twirled around so fast that he became a blur. The children got dizzy just watching him.

BOOM! There was a puff of smoke and all of a sudden, Chuck E came to life. Ariyah screamed. She was petrified of mice and Chuck E had become the tallest mouse she had ever seen. He had huge big white teeth, big pointing pink ears, the longest wobbly nose, and whiskers that tickled Imani when she stood next to him. Imani grabbed one of Chuck E's long whiskers.



“Ouch!” he screamed. “That was sore!” Imani was startled, “You are real, Chuck E!”

“Of course I am real, Imani. As long as the music plays, I am real. When the music stops...well then I am no longer real.”

Imani felt sad to think how Chuck E must feel knowing that the music always comes to an end. But Chuck E just laughed, took Imani by the hand, and continued to dance. He shuffled his feet, did the splits, and wiggled his tail.

Tummies were big and round and filled with pizza and hearts were bubbling with happiness. The children couldn't stop thanking Grandmamma Dalila for organizing such a perfect day.

“Wait till tomorrow,” smiled Grandmamma, “I have something even more exciting planned.”

“Even more exciting?” Ariyah shouted in disbelief. No day could be more exciting than the one they had just had.

For the rest of the ride home there was silence in the rusty old SUV and all that could be heard was the faint hmmmmmm of the tires contentedly singing as they drove along the smooth road towards Grandmamma Dalila's house.

Chapter 6

STRANGE DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The following morning Grandmamma Dalila was up early busying herself in the kitchen. She wondered what she could serve the children for breakfast. “Something different,” Grandmamma Dalila thought. “Something to get them wondering about what to expect for the day ahead,” Grandmamma Dalila schemed and plotted. “Hmmmmm, maybe some green fried eggs with purple pancakes,” Grandmamma Dalila chuckled. “That will get them thinking.”

Slowly but surely the children filtered into the kitchen, one by one, dragging their feet and looking sleepy eyed.

“Well, look at you guys! Good morning,”

Grandmamma Dalila greeted each one with a big hug and kiss. “Everyone wash their face and brush their teeth?” she asked. “You know the drill. Same as every day when you wake! Head on back to the bathroom and when you are done, come eat this hearty breakfast I cooked for all of you.”

Grandmamma Dalila delicately placed two green fried eggs and four purple pancakes onto each of the four little plates.

Dillon and Ariyah were the first to be seated at the table. They stared from their plates to each other and then back at their plates. Never before had they seen such a strange looking breakfast.

Imani spoke out everyone’s thoughts, “Grandmamma Dalila! What is this? Can we eat green eggs and purple pancakes?”

“Of course you can, Imani. Give it a try. You will be pleasantly surprised.”

The children gingerly cut a piece of purple pancake, carefully placed a bit of green egg on top, and then slowly moved the fork to their mouths.

“Come along, children! Eat up. We have a full day of adventure ahead of us.”

Neved was the first to taste the morsel of food that was perched on the tip of his fork. “Mmmmmmmmmmm! This is yummy!” he squealed. And with that, all the children started pushing green eggs and purple pancakes into their mouths.

“Yummy, yummy, yummy!” they chorused. Amidst the clank and tinkle of knives and forks, Ariyah heard the doorbell ring. Dinng Donnng! “Go and see who is at the door one of you,” instructed Grandmamma Dalila.

“I will go,” said Ariyah, jumping up and running from the kitchen. She peeped through the blinds, “It’s Auntie Spencer!” Auntie Spencer was Grandmamma Dalila’s youngest daughter and the children would be so excited to see her again. Ariyah threw open the door, “Auntie Spencer! Hello there!”

“Hey, Ari! Give me a hug. You are getting such a big girl!” Auntie Spencer headed towards the kitchen and greeted the others with warm hugs and kisses. “Looks like I’m just in time for breakfast.”

“No!” shouted Neved, worrying he would have to share his delicious breakfast with his aunt. He wasn’t about to give away any of this strange, but good tasting food.

“Come along, kids,” Grandmamma Dalila instructed. “Time to clean up and head on outside. We have a surprise waiting for you.”

The last fork loads of green eggs and purple pancakes were shoveled into overflowing little mouths. Chew, chew chew, a quick swallow, and a scramble for the front door. Waiting on the front porch were six bicycles, four of them with bright red ribbons tied around the handlebars.

“Wow!” screamed Dillon. “Those are so cool! Are they for us?”

“They are indeed,” said Grandmamma Dalila and Auntie Spencer together. “But remember to look where you are going. Don’t ride off without us and use your brakes to stop the bicycle – not your feet, Dillon. You don’t want to mess up your shoes!” However, Dillon wasn’t listening. He had mounted the brand new bicycle and was peddling down the garden path. Neved shouted, “Wait for me, Dillon!” and the two boys faded into the distance. Grandmamma Dalila wasn’t worried about the boys, because she lived in a peaceful suburb and at the end of the road was a cul-de-sac. The boys would have to turn around and come back the same way that they went. In that way, the girls would catch up with them.

The four girls pedaled slowly down the road taking in the beauty of the neighborhood. Ariyah was fascinated with all the new houses. She could not remember seeing so many different colored homes on her last visit. “Grandmamma, are these houses all new?” Ariyah asked at last.

“They aren’t all new, Ariyah. But every sunny day, early in the morning, the old homes which you would remember magically turn into these wonderful creations. Don’t you just love all the colors? And what about that ice-castle down the road? Isn’t it pretty? It is one of my favorite and in spite of the warm weather and the bright sunshine, it never melts.”

Imani strained her eyes looking for the ice-castle. She could only just see the tall steeple sticking out above the roofs of the other homes.

“You must all soak in as much of the sites as you possibly can, because we never know how long these magical homes will last. Every day, when the sun goes down, the colors begin to fade and all the old houses return. But come morning time, all the magical houses are back again. I hope they will never disappear completely; I will be very sad should that happen.” “Well I think they are beautiful,” said Ariyah gazing into the garden where there was a massive old silver oak tree. It was so tall Ariyah could not see the top branches. “Do you think it goes all the way up to the clouds, Grandmamma?”

“I am not sure, Ariyah. Maybe we should take a closer look. Dillon and Neved!” Grandmamma Dalila shouted for the boys. “We are going to explore in the huge old silver oak tree. Do you want to join us?”

But Dillon and Neved were racing up and down the road. Competing against each other was far more fun than looking at some boring old tree. “No thanks, Grandmamma!”

“Come along girls, let’s go and explore!”

At the base of the trunk was a small door with a bright shiny brass doorknob. Imani formed a little fist with her right hand and knocked firmly on the door. The girls all stood quietly waiting for someone or something to appear at the door, but there was no answer. Again, Imani lifted her hand to knock on the door. Yet, again, there was no answer. Slowly and steadily, she turned the doorknob, gently pushing the door open. CREEEEEEK. Tip-toeing they went in.

In the darkness of the hollow old tree, Grandmamma Dalila could see two stairwells, one leading up, and the other leading down. Grandmamma Dalila urged Ariyah, Imani, and Auntie Spencer to choose the stairwell that went up; after all, they needed to see if the top of the tree really did reach the clouds.

Slowly but surely they walked up the stairs one by one, careful not to make too much noise. The stairs were never ending. Ariyah complained that her legs were burning, Auntie Spencer simply sat down, and refused to go any higher, Imani and Grandmamma Dalila pushed on one-step at a time, climbing higher and higher.

“Look, Grandmamma! Look up there!” Imani could see the bright blue sky peering through the lush green and silver leaves of the old tree. “It really does go right up to the sky, Ariyah. Come and look!” Imani had forgotten that she was afraid of heights and it was only when she had reached the very last step that her knees began to shake. “I think we need to go down, Grandmamma.”

With lots of huffing and puffing and with hearts beating loudly in their throats, the girls finally reached the landing. Ariyah really wanted to attempt the other stairwell – the one that seemed to go down into the ground, but Grandmamma Dalila and Auntie Spencer were breathless. “We’ll leave those stairs for another day, Ariyah.”

Grandmamma Dalila thought there was something really strange about that empty tree trunk. Whoever or whatever lived inside was either hiding or just not there. She wondered who it was.

While the girls had been exploring the tree, Dillon and Neved raced around the neighborhood on their bicycles. They had both not realized how rapidly time had passed and how far they had ventured away from where they last had seen Grandmamma Dalila and the others. Dillon looked at Neved with big eyes and Neved turned pale. All of a sudden they weren’t feeling so confident anymore. They felt a cold creeping up their spines and they shivered at the thought of what it could be.

“Dillon, we need to try and find our way home!”

Grandmamma Dalila, Auntie Spencer and the two girls had already begun walking towards home. The sun was starting to set and the sky was turning a beautiful deep purple. Ariyah and Imani noticed that all the colorful homes had started to fade and the ice-castle was slowly melting away. Ariyah looked back at the big old silver oak tree that they climbed, but it was no longer there. In its place was just a small bushel.

“Pedal faster, Neved!” shouted Dillon. “It is starting to get dark. If we don’t find our way soon, we will never get back to Grandmamma Dalila’s house.”

“I’m pedaling as fast as I can, Dillon!” “Faster, Neved, faster!”

“Dillon, I don’t recognize any of these houses. What is happening?” Neved started to cry.

“Look, Neved!” Dillon shouted. “Look ahead of us. There is a sign.” The boys stopped

beneath a road sign that had a flashing yellow arrow pointing to the left. Dillon wondered if they should follow the direction of the arrow.

It was as if the road sign had read Dillon's thoughts. "Of course you must follow my instructions, young man!" the road sign said indignantly. "Do you think I am standing here flashing this arrow for no one?"

"Who was that?" Neved's head shot around, thinking that someone had crept up on them. But there was no one around—just Dillon Neved and the road sign.

"Did you say something, Neved?" questioned Dillon.

"No!"

The cold shivers had started to creep up their spines again.

"Pedal, Neved, pedal!"



"Dillon and Neved! Where have the two of you been? We have been hunting up and down the neighborhood looking for you both." Grandmamma was delighted to see her grandsons. "Come along kids, we need to go indoors. It sounds like thunder. I think we are going to get some rain."

Auntie Spencer had had enough adventure for the day. She didn't need an excuse to pack away her bicycle, collect her bag and climb into her car. "Buy, Auntie Spencer," the children greeted. "It was lovely seeing you again." And with a VROOM, Auntie Spencer disappeared around the corner and was gone.

"Grandmamma, may we play in the rain puddles? We have such a fun game. We jump into the puddles and see who can manage to stay dry," Imani asked.

"That's a strange game," said Grandmamma Dalila pulling up her face.

"There is more to the game, Imani," corrected Ariyah. "The aim is to try and get the other players as wet as possible, but for you to stay as dry as you can."

"Well, that sounds like fun! We'll have to just wait and see if it does indeed rain."

It was not supposed to rain that week while the children were on holiday, but it sure looked like rain. The thunder rumbled and the beautiful purple sky turned a deep and dark gray. Pit, pat, pit, pat the rain started to fall and the children sat around the little table in Grandmamma Dalila's kitchen watching the puddles of water get bigger and bigger.

"Find your rain boots and rain jackets, kids. Time to go out and play your game!"

"Wheeeee!" excitedly shouted the children scrambling around looking for their boots and jackets.

"Hahahahaha!" Dillon laughed. "Grandmamma Dalila, you look like a cupcake in your jacket." He was pointing to his grandmother who was waiting at the front door dressed in a purple jacket that was decorated with bright pink flowers.

"Well, Dillon! You look like a superhero ready to take on the world in yours!" Grandmamma hugged Dillon. "Come, kids. Let's go jump in the puddles!"

Grandmamma Dalila and her four grandchildren twirled around in the rain, held hands and then they all jumped in a big puddle of water, SPLASH!

When their feet hit the ground, it opened up like a great big hungry mouth. Ariyah felt

herself falling, and because they were still all holding hands, as she fell, she pulled Dillon, Neved, Imani, and Grandmamma Dalila with her. Down, down, down, they slid, screeching all the way.



THUMP! They hit the bottom. Where were they? Imani had closed her eyes, but when she felt the thump, she opened them. There they all sat with wide eyes and open mouths. Never had they seen so many beautiful colors and so many rainbows. Shining butterflies the size of dinner plates flew around their heads. Dragon flies with blue eyes smiled at them as they whizzed past. This was surely the most beautiful magical place they had ever seen.

“What is this place?” asked Ariyah.

“I don’t know, Ariyah. But isn’t it so pretty? There are flowers and butterflies everywhere and even a water slide.” Grandmamma breathed in deeply. The sweet scent of the flowers rushed up her nose.

“As pretty as this place is, we cannot stay here forever, kids. We need to find a way out. Follow me!”

Grandmamma Dalila placed one foot ahead of the other with her four grandchildren close

behind her. The bright colorful patterns danced around them while they followed the winding path that seemed to be leading them home.

Way in the distance, Grandmamma Dalila could see a small, bright pink door. It looked very similar to the one they had seen at the base of the trunk of the giant silver oak tree. As Imani had done earlier that day, Grandmamma Dalila cautiously opened the little door, peeked her head in and softly said, “Yoo-hoo...anyone here?”

“Oo-oo-oo,” echoed back at them. The opening through the door was very small. Grandmamma Dalila would have to stoop down low to squeeze through, but the children were small enough to fit just fine. They squeezed their little bodies through the opening, and straight ahead of them, they saw a flight of stairs that lead up to another little door.

Again, Grandmamma Dalila opened the door carefully and peeked through. What she saw astounded her. “My, my, my!” exclaimed Grandmamma. “I thought I recognized this place.

Imani, do you remember what color that little door was that was at the base of the old silver oak tree?”

“I think it was a green door, Grandmamma. It had a bright shiny brass doorknob,” guessed Imani.

“Well, look here,” said Grandmamma. “This little door is a green door and there is a shiny brass doorknob.”

“Yay!” shouted Ariyah. “So we did get to explore the other stairway inside the old silver oak tree! Now we know what was down there, Grandmamma!” Ariyah was so excited and Dillon and Neved felt rather disappointed that they had chosen not to join the girls earlier that day when they went to explore.

The rain had stopped falling and the stars had come out and were twinkling. Grandmamma Dalila felt the chilly breeze licking her wet arms. In all the excitement, she had forgotten that the children’s clothes were still wet from playing in the water. She needed to get them home to dry them off before one of them caught a cold.

Just as they got to the front door of Grand-mamma Dalila’s home, “AAAAAAACHEW!” Imani let out the loudest sneeze that made them all jump in fright.

“Bless you, angel,” said Grandmamma Dalila. “Let’s get you all inside and into a warm bath. You need to all dress warmly. We’re going to the movies and we don’t want to be late.”

Chapter 7

IT'S SHOWTIME!

Grandmamma Dalila and the four children piled into the rusty old SUV and once again, it jumped along the road, sharing in the excitement of the children. Again, Dillon could hear the moans from Timothy Tortoise as he was being bounced around the SUV.

“Finally,” sighed Timothy when Grandmamma pulled up into a parking space. “I thought we’d never arrive at the movies.”

“Five tickets for Despicable Me, please,” asked Grandmamma Dalila taking the money out of her purse to pay the ticket lady.

With popcorn, candy and drinks in hand, Grandmamma Dalila led the children to their seats. Much arguing and shuffling proceeded, but

Grandmamma soon settled who would sit next to whom and the children were all finally all settled.



It wasn't long when the theater lights started to dim and soon the room turned dark. Neved called out, "Grandmamma! Who turned out the lights?"

Grandmamma chuckled, "It's time for the movie to start Neved. Shhhh now, let's watch the film."

It seemed that Grandmamma Dalila was enjoying herself as much as the children were. She too was shoveling popcorn and candy into her mouth, laughing and munching and wiping sticky juice from off her chin. She smiled, feeling so content and happy. "This is what life is all about," she thought to herself. "Time spent with my babies."

"This is such fun, Grandmamma! I love this movie!" whispered Imani.

"I'm going to have my own minions one day," Dillon nudged Neved. "And I think I'm going to make you one of them," he laughed out loud. "Shhhh," Ariyah glared at him.

The movie flew by and before they knew it, it was over.



On the way home, all that could be heard was the excited chatter of how funny the movie was and how much they all enjoyed themselves. Everyone singing the happy song (because I'm happy). Then, out of the blue, Ariyah asked, "Can we get a dog, Grandmamma Dalila? Please?"

Grandmamma was rather taken aback. She was not sure why Ariyah would want a dog all of a sudden, but she was not about to upset the child.

"You know a puppy is a big responsibility and who is going to keep the puppy? It would have to stay here with me once you all leave."

Ariyah replied, "I know and I will take care of it while I am here visiting you, Grandmamma. I promise. Besides, it will be an excuse for me to visit more often."

Now, the child had a good point. "I tell you what. Once we get home, I will Google animal shelters and see if there are any puppies available." "Yippee!" they all shouted with glee. "We gonna get a dog!"

Grandmamma kept her promise. When they got home she sat down at the computer with all her grandchildren hovering over her shoulder. All eyes were on the computer screen. "Okay. Let me find a pet store or an animal shelter. Where are we going to find a puppy?"

Click, click, click, Grandmamma Dalila's finger tapped the buttons on the computer mouse.

"Found one! And it's just up the road from my house! And they are still open!"

The children hadn't noticed, but sitting in the far dark corner of the room was a little mouse trembling with fear. "Oh no!" he squealed. "There is a potential enemy going to enter my turf!"

Chapter 8

“MCKENZIE”

“Everybody, get your shoes back on and head to the SUV. We are going puppy shopping!” Grandmamma yelled.

Another bumpy drive in the old SUV and plenty of moans from Timothy Tortoise, but soon they arrived at the animal shelter. The children could hear dogs barking, birds chirping, and cats meowing. They had never been to an animal shelter before and all the noises, sights, and smells made them feel quite over-whelmed.

Standing at the door to the little office was a rather round smiling white rabbit. Ariyah bent down to stroke it, but quickly withdrew her hand when he cooed, “Missy...mind my beautiful long ears, will you. How can I help you so late in the evening?”

The children had become used to these strange talking creatures in Grandmamma Dalila’s neighborhood, so a fat talking white rabbit didn’t surprise them in the least.

“We are looking for a puppy,” said Ariyah. “Okay, any specific type of puppy? Small, medium, big? We have them all.”

“A small white and fluffy puppy, Mr. Rabbit.” “Great! Let us walk down the aisles. You look into all the pens and if you see one that catches your heart, you just shout out.”

The children marched up and down the long corridors and all Grandmamma could hear were the “oohs” and “aahs” of the children. All of the animals were bidding for attention and for someone to take them home. The children heard the pleas, “Take me please.” “I will be good.” “I don’t eat much.” “Don’t take him, he bites.” “Don’t take her, she’s too big.”

Dillon felt sad. He wanted to take all the animals home, but he knew that they could not. “Sorry guys. We are here for a fluffy white puppy. We can’t take you all.”

Ariyah let out a huge yelp jumping up and down frantically, “That one right there!”



Everyone stopped and looked. Sitting in a kennel was a very small, white puppy with fluffy fur and cute big brown eyes. “Mr. Rabbit, that is the one I want!”

Signing all the papers took quite some time, but after promising to love and look after the puppy the children and Grandmamma Dalila climbed back into the SUV to make their way home.

The next few minutes were spent deciding on a name. Finally, after working themselves through the whole alphabet, Ariyah decided, “I will call her McKenzie.”

“McKenzie, hmmm,” thought Grandmamma. “That’s a nice name, Ariyah.”

Dillon and Neved crooned the puppy’s new name in approval.

McKenzie was given a warm bed in the corner of Grandmamma Dalila’s bedroom where she would not feel lonely. The children eagerly filled her new little bowls with food and fresh water and lay paper on the floor. Grandmamma Dalila explained to the children that McKenzie was still a baby. She would need to be “potty trained” just as they were when they were young.

“That is so funny,” laughed Neved. Grandmamma Dalila agreed that it was indeed funny, but a necessary lesson that the children would have to teach their new puppy. She would have to

be taken outside every so often to do her business. Sooner or later, she would learn that she could not make a mess in the house.

“And when she obliges, you must reward her with a dog biscuit. That way she will want to go outside.”

Another very busy day had gone by and everyone was feeling tired. Ariyah picked up her white fluffy puppy, gave it a soft kiss on its little head, and whispered, “I’m so glad I found you, McKenzie. Welcome to our family.”

Grandmamma Dalila was exhausted and all she wanted to do was to lie down. “Come, children. Time for bed. Tomorrow is going to be another very busy and exciting day.”

Chapter 9

THEME PARK THRILLS

“Theme park day, wake up everyone. It is time to rise and shine. Eat your breakfast quickly, so we can go; we have to get to the park early, so we can have all day to go on as many rides as possible.”

Bumpety bumpety bump. The old SUV jumped along the road and Timothy Tortoise complained as usual, “Aaaaah, here we go again!”

The children were so looking forward to the day and when they saw the entrance to the park, Imani could not hold back her squeal of excitement. It was such a busy park. Everywhere they looked they could see people, sign posts, and rides.

It was a scorching hot day and the sun was beaming down upon them. It was not long before the children’s little faces began to glow with sweat and Grandmamma was frantically looking for her fan to cool herself down. But the children didn’t mind. Nothing was going to prevent them from having the time of their lives. Grandmamma warned the children to stay close to her and not to run ahead. There were so many people at the park; she did not want to lose any of her babies.

“Who wants to ride the flying swing?” Grandmamma Dalila asked.

Of course, the children all shouted at once, “ME, ME, ME, ME!”

They watched the other children going around and around on the flying swing. The ride seemed to last forever, but finally the swings slowed down and came to a stop. The children’s turn was up next, but Grandmamma Dalila would not be joining them. She said she was too old. Nevertheless, she would stand on the side, just behind the fence, and watch them flying around in circles.

One by one, the children climbed into their seats and when they were safely buckled in place, their chairs slowly, slowly started to move.

“This is boring,” complained Dillon.

But, soon the swing started to turn faster and faster. The children’s knuckles turned whiter and whiter and they held onto the metal bar that clamped them into the seat tighter and tighter.

Ariyah, Dillon, Neved and Imani all started to scream and cry. “I want to get off! I’m scared!” There was no way of stopping the ride.

“Please, Mr. Man. Please stop!” Neved begged. And just when Neved felt as if his breakfast was going to leave his stomach, the ride started to slow down and the chairs descended. With legs of jelly, the four grandchildren were lifted from their seats and they gingerly made their way to Grandmamma. She tried hard not to laugh, but it was quite amusing to see these four eager beady-eyed children climb onto the ride and then to see them so transformed into scared little

jelly beans. She hugged them all and assured them that they would soon be fine and ready to climb on the next ride. "The carousel next!" Imani screeched. "Please, Grandmamma, please!"

Once again the children had to stand in a long queue to wait for their turn. Knowing they could pick whichever animal they wanted to ride on made it all the more exciting. Ariyah chose to sit on the giraffe, Dillon on the horse and Imani on the seal. Grandmamma Dalila and Neved got into the coach seats together and Neved gently took Grandmamma's hand.

The Carousel started to go around and around and the music was playing tutuutuutruturrrr and the breeze was blowing.

The children felt much happier on this ride. It was not quite as fast or scary as the Flying Swing. Grandmamma was so grateful to be relaxing in a seat for a while. To get off her tired old feet and rest was absolute heaven. They had been doing plenty of walking over the past few days and Grandmamma was starting to feel her old age. For a short while, Grandmamma closed her eyes and felt soothed by the gentle rocking of the carriage. Faintly, somewhere in the distance, she heard Dillon's voice, "Giddy up, horsey. Slow down, horsey." The music continued to play and the lights shone brightly. The sound of laughing children filled the warm summer air. It was as if the whole world was smiling with Grandmamma Dalila and her grandchildren.

The next ride would be the automatic cars. This was Ariyah's request. She had always wanted to drive a car. However, as the queue became shorter, Ariyah became more and more nervous and she started to make those strange noises in her throat. "Now, now, Ariyah," Grandmamma Dalila assured her. "You know I would never put you in a situation where you might hurt yourself. Besides, I will be sitting right behind you. You can do it, Ariyah."

Dillon wasn't that confident about Ariyah driving, but Grandmamma gave him that look and he knew that if he did not climb into the car, he would have to face trouble.

"We are all ready! It's our turn to pull off. Push the gas pedal, Ariyah!" And she did! The car shot forward and five heads jerked back. Ariyah hung onto the steering wheel as if it were her life. Sweat was pouring off her forehead and her heart was pounding in her throat.

"A little more gas, Ariyah." VROOM! And the little car shot forward even faster.



Imani was as quiet as usual. Her eyes were stuck on the cars in front of them and she was too scared to move. As often as the others cheered Ariyah on to go faster and faster, Imani prayed she would take her foot off the gas.

Dillon hollered, “Blow the horn, Ariyah!”

She was really getting the hang of this driving thing. Honk honk honk – the little car tooted as Grandmamma and the children shot around the track.

“Hey, kid! Lighten up a bit!” “Who was that?” Ariyah shouted. “Don'tpushmyhornsohard,” said the little red car Ariyah was driving. “Who said that?” Ariyah was confused. “I did!” said the little red car.

“I have feelings too you know!” The little red car skidded around the corner lifting two of its little wheels off the track.

“Whoaaa!” cried Imani, the first sound she had made since they got into the car.

BOING! As Ariyah straightened the wheels, the little red car hit the track and was driving on all four wheels once again.

A whistle blew and a black and white checkered flag was being waved up and down. “Yoo hoo!” shouted Grandmamma Dalila throwing her hands in the air. “We have won, Ariyah. Your driving skills got our car across the finish line first. Well done!”

“That was so much fun,” Neved said smiling from ear to ear.

“Thank you little red car,” Ariyah blew him a kiss as she walked away.

Grandmamma Dalila had made up her mind that she could not walk much further that day. They would take the Skyline Ride to the other side of the theme park.

The carts were large enough for all five of them to sit quite comfortably and Grandmamma Dalila settled herself down between Neved and Dillon with Ariyah and Imani sitting opposite them. Her legs ached and her ankles were swollen, but she was content to be relaxing at last.

With a jolt, the cart moved forward and then stopped. Then another jolt and the cart jumped another few inches forward. With each jump forward, Imani would bump her head against the seat rest.

“Keep yourselves buckled in!” shouted the conductor. “This is going to be a bumpy ride!” The little cart climbed up, up, up into the sky.

“Wow! Grandmamma, we’re getting higher and higher. Look how high up we are, look!” Dillon was beaming with excitement.

The cart rocked a little and Neved’s eyes grew large, but the others were so fascinated with the scenery going by, they hardly noticed Neved’s fear. Once again, the cart rocked; it rattled and shook. This time all the children and even Grandmamma fell silent. They looked at Grandmamma for reassurance. Grandmamma Dalila tried to keep calm and just smiled at the children. She told them that this was all part of the ride and they had nothing to worry about, however, she felt her heart beating in her throat.

Suddenly there was a loud rattling sound and the cables started to snap. Ping! Ping! Ping! One at a time, the cables holding the little cart in place let go and the little white cart floated higher and higher into the sky. It was a strange thing, but Grandmamma and the children had lost their fear and were starting to enjoy this new adventure.

“Something is heading in our direction, Grandmamma!” Dillon shouted.

Grandmamma squinted her eyes trying to make out what it was. As they floated closer and closer, she could make out the shape of something she had not seen in a very long time. Four unicorns were fast approaching the cart.

One unicorn greeted them, “Hey guys! What are you doing up here?”

Dillon replied, “We don’t really know. We were just at the theme park crossing over to the other side, when we just floated into the sky.”

“We live up here in the clouds and we watch over you.”

“Are you going to help take us back down to the theme park?” asked Dillon.

“Well, if you want us to. We will take you back to the park,” said the first unicorn. The four unicorns stood at the four sides of the cart, holding it gently with their horns. They bowed their heads down low and the little white cart gently floated back down onto the Skyline track.

“Thank you!” shouted Imani.

“You are welcome,” came the reply from way up in the clouds.

The children heard a flap of wings and the unicorns flew up into the heavens and were gone.

“Did that just really happen or are we dreaming?” asked Dillon.

The Skyline Ride came to a halt on the other side of the theme park. Grandmamma Dalila and the children got out of the cart and looked up into the sky. But the unicorns were gone, so Grandmamma could only shrug her shoulders and encourage the children for one more ride, “Come children. It is time to move on. It’s time for the roller coaster.”

“Oh, Grandmamma! Not the roller coaster! It goes too fast!” said Dillon with his mouth agape. “I don’t want to ride it!”

“Oh, come on, Dillon. It will be fun!” said Grandmamma Dalila.

“But, I’m scared, Grandmamma,” said Dillon with tears welling up in his eyes.

“Don’t be scared. Grandmamma Dalila will protect you and it is not as fast as it looks.”

Ariyah told Grandmamma Dalila that she wanted to sit with her on the ride, but Grandmamma said Dillon needed Ariyah and she should rather sit with him. Besides, Grandmamma needed to sit with Neved and Imani, the two smaller children.

Reluctantly, Dillon and Ariyah climbed into the seat in front of Neved, Imani, and Grandmamma.

CLICK! The children remembered hearing these same strange noises just before the Skyline cart had floated off into the sky. They looked at Grandmamma with big eyes, but she just smiled and reassured them that the sound meant they were locked in, so they could not fall out.

The roller coaster started to move very slowly and Dillon thought that it wasn’t so scary after all. However, Grandmamma knew what was coming, so she told them to hold on tight.

Up, up, up, the roller coaster chugged. The hill that it was climbing was so steep that they were almost lying on their backs. Dillon kept his eyes on the tracks ahead of them. As long as he could see them, he felt safe.

Suddenly, the tracks disappeared as the little cart reached the top of the hill. With screeches and arms raised high, Grandmamma Dalila, Dillon, Ariyah, Imani, and Neved felt themselves dropping like stones. The little cart plummeted to the bottom of the hill at such a speed that their tummies felt as if they had turned upside down.

“This is fun! Hehheeeee!” giggled Ariyah.

Up and down, to the left, to the right, a jolt here and a bump there, slow down, speed up and the roller coaster ride was finally over.

Everyone was out of breath with excitement. Dillon was not convinced that the roller coaster was the best ride, even though Ariyah was squealing for more.

That was the last ride for the day. It was time to head for the SUV and make their way home, but Imani complained that she was hungry.

“Can we stop for pizza, Grandmamma?”

Chapter 10

ROAD TRIP BEACH BOUND

The following day the children packed their bags, scooped up McKenzie and piled her into the old SUV. They were going on a road trip to the beach, which was going to be a very long ride. Excitement filled the air when Grandmamma Dalila told them they were about to spend the weekend playing in the sand and swimming in the waves.

As Grandmamma drove along, the children sang, laughed, talked, and snacked on all the delicious food that Grandmamma had packed. The trees shot past them as Grandmamma vroomed along the highway. The sky was crystal blue and here and there the white puffy clouds floated by. Ariyah wondered if the unicorns were up in the sky somewhere.

After many hours of driving, the children became very quiet. Grandmamma Dalila looked into the review mirror and saw that Neved, Dillon and Imani had all fallen asleep. And sitting next to Grandmamma in the passenger seat was Ariyah with McKenzie on her lap. Both Ariyah and McKenzie were also far away in slumber land.



“Grandmamma, don’t they just look too adorable?”

“They do, indeed, Timothy Tortoise. They do indeed!”

Grandmamma Dalila continued driving on down the road. McKenzie had woken up, jumped onto her lap, and made herself comfortable. It was good to have McKenzie for company while the children were sleeping. Grandmamma slipped one of her favorite CD's into the thin slot just above the radio she and began singing along with the tune. “♪♪ Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never gonna run around and desert you ♪♪.”

It had been a long day on the road and the sun was beginning to set. Grandmamma could see the hotel in the distance. “Wake up! We’re almost there!” Grandmamma shouted.

The hotel that Grandmamma had booked into had a beautiful view overlooking the beach. The children were so excited to be staying in such a posh hotel. The floors sparkled; the beds were soft and made up with crispy white linen. Everywhere the children looked were scented flowers and baskets of fresh fruit.

It had indeed been a very long day on the road. Grandmamma was tired and even though the children and McKenzie had slept most of the trip, they too were ready for bed. Or was it just the excitement of sleeping in those large feather beds that made them only too happy to jump into

bed? With tummies filled with the finest dinner, eyelids became heavy and nothing was more comfortable, nor more welcoming, than those beds. It wasn't long when snoring floated through the air.

There came a faint knocking on the door. Whoever could that be? But Grandmamma and the children would never find out.

Chapter 11

FUN IN THE SUN

The sun rose early the next day and smiled warmly into the hotel room. It rested on the cheeks of each grandchild, creating a rosy glow that promised an exciting day ahead for them. It was to be a perfect day for the beach.

Imani had never been to the beach, so she was somewhat afraid to get in the seawater. The waves crashing onto the shore and the sand that seemed to suck in her feet as she walked frightened her. After all, had Grandmamma not warned her that the sea waves were very strong and it was safest to stay close to her?

“Imani, you are scared?” teased Dillon.

“Leave her alone, Dillon. Don't tease. That's not nice; You know how you feel when Ariyah teases you!”

“Take your time, Imani. Just take little steps. Slowly put your toes into the water and when you feel comfortable, put your whole foot in. Hold my hand and I will stay with you right here.” Imani felt safe when Grandmamma held her hand. They stood on the shore for quite some time and Imani got used to the sand eating her feet. She was amused by the way they kept sinking into the wet sand and she started to like the feel of the sand between her toes.

“Can we build castles with this sand, Grandmamma?”

Grandmamma Dalila couldn't remember when she last built sand castles. She was sure it must have been when she was just a little girl. But Imani was sure that Grandmamma must have built sand castles every weekend, because she was so good at it.



Neved, Dillon, and Ariyah had been jumping over the smaller waves and swimming through the very large ones. At one stage, Dillon swallowed some of the seawater when a really large wave tumbled him over. Around and around he turned in somersaults.

When at last he surfaced, he had a mouth filled with salty water and his swimming trunks were heavy with sand.

“Hahahah,” Ariyah giggled pointing at him. “Your pants are filled with sand! Be careful they don’t fall down!”

“That’s not funny, Ariyah. It makes my skin itch. And that water is so salty!” Dillon spat onto the sand.

By that stage the Ariyah, Dillon and Neved had found their way to Imani and Grandmamma Dalila. She assured Dillon that he would not get ill from drinking some of the seawater. In fact, it would probably help settle his stomach after he had eaten such a large plate of eggs for breakfast.”

Everyone laughed and joined in on building the biggest castle Imani had ever seen.

“Let’s go and rent a kayak and go for a paddle,” suggested Grandmamma. The sun was baking hot and the children were beginning to burn.

“Will we get to wear life jackets too?” asked Neved.

“Absolutely, Neved. In fact, you will not be allowed into the kayak unless you have a life jacket on.”

There was one small problem. The kayak could only seat four. Grandmamma Dalila needed to be in the kayak so she could keep an eye on the two small children and she needed to paddle with the one oar.

Dillon said, “I will paddle alongside the kayak on my boogie board, Grandmamma!” “You are very good at boogie boarding, Dillon!”

Ariyah climbed into the kayak and sat down next to Neved. Grandmamma Dalila wobbled unsteadily on her feet and plonked herself down heavily next to Imani. Handing Ariyah one oar and taking up the other one herself, she instructed, “Right, Ariyah. Time to paddle, girl!” Grandmamma Dalila barked out steadily, “Row...row...row!”

But this rowing thing was just not working. The kayak spun around and around in circles. The faster Ariyah and Grandmamma rowed, the faster it spun. They just could not get the kayak to go in a straight line.

“This is hard work, Grandmamma,” Ariyah laughed.

“It sure is!” giggled Grandmamma Dalila. “We need to get our timing right, girl!”

Finally they got the hang of it and slowly but surely the kayak cut through the surface of the water and moved steadily further away from the shoreline. The waves were hitting the kayak rocking it ever so slightly and the salty sea air kissed their faces.

Being pulled along by the kayak was not Dillon’s idea of fun, and he soon became bored with being towed, so he decided to stand up on his boogie board and try his hand at surfing.

He eased his feet under his body and slowly raised his body into a standing position. “Look at me, everyone!” It felt as if he was flying.

And indeed, he was! Dillon was totally unaware of the dolphin that had swum beneath the boogie board and lifted it up above the water. “WHEEEE! This is such fun!” Dillon squealed as he shot past the kayak. The dolphin gave Dillon the ride of his life before lowering him gently back down onto the surface of the water.

“Thank you, Mr. Dolphin. Have a lovely day!” Dillon shouted waving his hand frantically to say goodbye.

“It was my pleasure, Dillon!” The dolphin shot out of the sea high into the sky, flipped over a few times, and then landed with a mighty splash.

Dillon didn’t see the wave building up, but he sure felt the THUMP as it knocked him off his boogie board. The children all laughed to see

Dillon’s legs flying in the air. This was the second time that day that he had been dunked under the water by the powerful sea.

Grandmamma Dalila jumped up calling, “Dillon! Are you alright?” The kayak rocked dangerously and the other children all squealed.

With a splutter and cough, Dillon’s head broke the surface of the water, “Sure are,

Grandmamma!” “Goodness! That was a close one. I think we must turn back, kids. The waves are getting higher and stronger and we are floating a little too far out.” Rowing back to shore was a little easier. Grandmamma and Ariyah were rowing like experts and Dillon was hanging onto the kayak with all his strength.

Grandmamma thought they had all had enough adventure for the day and it was time to head back to the hotel.

Their little bodies covered in sea sand and stinging from the hot sun baking down on them all day, Grandmamma suggest, “It might be a good idea to rinse off in the swimming pool at the hotel, kids. Get all that salty water and sand off your little bodies!”

The children didn’t need a second invitation. “Last one in is a rotten egg!” shouted Neved. One after the other the children ran for the pool and jumped in. SPLASH! SPLASH! SPLASH!

SPLASH!

Grandmamma Dalila watched their little bodies sink to the bottom of the pool, frantic little legs kicking madly and then four little heads bob up to the surface of the water.

Diving and somersaulting, jumping and twisting, turning and bending, the grandchildren were having the time of their lives. It was good to swim in water that didn’t taste like salt.

And then it was time for the sun to go start getting ready for bed, as it was for the children. But before they ventured back to their hotel room, Grandmamma Dalila, Ariyah, Dillon, Neved and Imani stood on the balcony overlooking the sea. The sun offered the children a tired smile before sinking below the horizon.

“He looks sad, Grandmamma,” said Imani. “Not sad, Imani. Just tired. I think maybe we all need to go off to bed.”

And so the beautiful sunset was the perfect ending to a beautiful day.

The children slept soundly and so did Grandmamma Dalila. Then, once again, there came a faint knocking at the door.

Chapter 12

TIME IS COMING TO AN END

Time seemed to fly by and the last day of the children's visit had arrived. They all had such an awesome summer vacation with Grandmamma Dalila. But all good things have to come to an end. Well, that is what Grandmamma Dalila had always told them.

There was one more surprise for the children, though. Their Auntie Arden, Grandmamma Dalila's daughter, had driven down to visit for the day before the children had to leave for home. She arrived just in time for breakfast. The children were getting tired of Grandmamma Dalila's green eggs and purple pancakes, so they asked if they could have cereal instead.

"Of course you may, kids. I have the perfect breakfast cereal for you."

Grandmamma Dalila stuck her hand into the large kitchen cupboard and pulled out the largest box of cereal the children had ever seen. This was no ordinary box of cereal. It seemed to have a life of its own. It hoped and jumped and Grandmamma had to hold onto it with two hands otherwise she might have dropped it.

"Make sure you have your spoons ready, kids. This is going to be fun!" Grandmamma winked at Auntie Arden.

"Are you sure you should be giving them this cereal?" Auntie Arden seemed to be quite weary of the box. She stood up and moved to the other end of the table.

Dillon wondered why Auntie Arden appeared to be afraid of the box of cereal. Just as he was about to ask her, Grandmamma opened the cardboard lid. POP! POP! POP! Out ran hundreds of little chocolate-coated cereal balls.

"Catch them, kids! Catch them!"

Ariyah and Imani grabbed handfuls and shoved them into their mouths. Dillon and Neved decided to scoop them up with their spoons. Even Grandmamma Dalila couldn't resist grabbing a couple of the little chocolate balls and hastily popped them into her mouth. "Don't you want some Auntie Arden?" asked Dillon.

"No thanks, Dillon. I don't think chocolate for breakfast is a good thing. Can't be healthy!" she frowned at Grandmamma Dalila, but Grandmamma just shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, Auntie Arden! Don't be a party pooper! Have some fun!" shouted Dillon.

"Who's a party pooper?" shouted Auntie Arden jumping up.

"You are!" laughed Dillon falling off his chair. "You'd better run, Stinky Wipps! I'm going to catch you!" teased Auntie Arden, knowing that Dillon hated that pet name. And with that he took off down the passage with Auntie Arden close behind him.

He managed to duck into the room without Auntie Arden seeing him, or maybe she just pretended not to see him. Either way, when she tip-toed past the door, Dillon jumped out and

onto her back.



“Gotcha!” he shouted, knocking Auntie Arden onto the floor. She rolled over with Dillon clinging on frantically. Tears of laughter rolled down their cheeks and their tummies ached from the giggling.

“Arden, leave Dillon alone. He needs to clean up and get ready. I have one more surprise for the children before they have to leave! We are going to visit the ‘On Air’ place. He needs all his energy to jump around on the inflatable jumpers.”

“Will you come with us, Auntie Arden?” begged Dillon. But Auntie Arden needed to get home, so she kissed the children goodbye and promised to visit again when next they visited Grandmamma Dalila.

Chapter 13

BEST TIME EVER

The 'On Air' place is filled with every inflatable slide and jumper imaginable. All children, big and small, just love visiting this place. Even Grandmamma Dalila secretly enjoyed jumping on the castles.

When they entered the place, they were given bright yellow ribbons to tie around their arms. Grandmamma Dalila explained that these would identify the children and ensure they would not get lost.

"Run wild now, children! Have fun!"

Neved couldn't make up his mind where he should jump first. He looked at the slide, he looked at the castle and he looked at the big round plastic ball. They all looked like so much fun. Grandmamma assured him that he could jump on all of them, so he climbed into the big ball first. He rolled around and around; one moment his legs were in the air and the next his head. All Grandmamma could see were his beautiful big eyes shining brightly with satisfaction and a row of pearly white teeth grinning as he rolled past her.

Dillon was jumping on the castle, turning flips, running backwards and having a thoroughly fun time. He was sorry Auntie Arden hadn't come with them; she would have enjoyed tumbling over the spongy walls and falling into the big pit of inflatable balls.

"Come and slide with me down the slope, Grandmamma Dalila," pleaded Ariyah sitting on top of a very high slide.

Grandmamma's old body was feeling very sore after such a hectic few days with the children. But she would not disappoint Ariyah and she reminded herself that this was their last day together after all.

Her old body would have to last a little longer. "Okay!" Grandmamma Dalila shouted back to Ariyah, "Here I come!" Grandmamma took off her shoes and climbed to the top of the inflatable slide. She sat behind Ariyah and held her tight. "Wheeee!" The two of them slid down.



“That was such fun! C'mon, Imani! Join us!” Once again, Grandmamma climbed up to the top of the slide where she met Ariyah and Imani. They sat one behind the other and Grandmamma gave the count down, “One, two, three! Wheeee!” All three sped down the slide toppling on top of each other when they reached the bottom.

“Let's do it again, Grandmamma Dalila!” Imani shouted excitedly.

For over an hour, Grandmamma, Ariyah, and Imani climbed up the slide and slid down again. And all the while, the boys were rolling around on the inflatable balls and jumping on the castle. In spite of the exhaustion, Grandmamma Dalila was in her element. She didn't want to think of those moments when she would have to kiss them all goodbye.

“It's time for Krispy Kreme!” Grandmamma suggested.

Chapter 14

DOUGHNUTS DOUGHNUTS

Krispy Kreme was the popular doughnut place nearby. Grandmamma Dalila wasted no time in ordering the most scrumptious looking doughnuts. The children excitedly compared the flavors of their doughnuts. “I have a cappuccino one.” “And I have a strawberry doughnut with yummy sprinkles!”

Imani’s face was covered in chocolate cake doughnut and Dillon had flecks of vanilla cream hanging from the tip of his nose. Neved’s cheeks were stuffed full and they looked like the inflatable balls they had been jumping on just minutes before.

Sugar, sprinkles, chocolate and cream were flying everywhere. Grandmamma thought she should tell the children to calm down and not to eat so much. But she stopped mid-sentence remembering that these were the last moments they had together to create memories. She would not be seeing the children again until the next holiday. She looked across the table at all four of her babies, laughing, and chatting with mouths dripping with doughnuts and on their heads they wore the little paper Krispy Kreme hats.



“It’s time to head on home and get your bags all packed, my children,” said Grandmamma Dalila feeling a sad lump sticking in her throat. She swallowed hard not wanting to let the children see the sadness she was feeling.

Sitting in the old SUV, waiting for the children to buckle themselves in before they made their way home, Grandmamma looked at the children in the rearview mirror, “Gosh!” she thought. “I am going to miss these children.” Even though the car still hopped and skipped along the road, Grandmamma was feeling sad.

She heard a feeble little, “sniff sniff,” coming from the back seat.

“What’s the matter?” But the children were all fast asleep. Timothy Tortoise, however, had a little white handkerchief in his right hand and he was wiping a tear from his eye, “I sure am going to miss these children, even if they would not allow me to sleep with them in the hotel room at the beach. I tried knocking on the door every night in hopes they would let me in. But no one opened the door for me.”

Grandmamma didn’t hear Timothy talking. She was too deep in thought. Their visit was over and she would take her grandchildren to the airport first thing in the morning.

Chapter 15

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

They arrived at the airport early the following morning. Grandmamma Dalila had allowed the children to take McKenzie along with them so they could play with her while they waited for their airplanes. McKenzie's tail wagged wildly from side to side. She loved playing with the children and would surely miss them as much as Grandmamma would.

Grandmamma Dalila kept her promise and had spoken with the flight attendant to allow the children to go up front, see the captain and the Cockpit. The flight attendant assured Grandmother that she would do whatever she could to get the children to meet the captain. This gave Neved and Dillon something else to look forward to.

Time seemed to stand still. Tick, tock, tick, tock...

Grandmamma Dalila hated this waiting. She thought of all the fun they could be having instead of sitting waiting the airport. "Such a waste of valuable time."

"Flight TN2004 to ...," Grandmamma Dalila faintly heard.

"It's time to say goodbye, children. We will have to do this again very soon. I will miss all of you so very much. Always remember how much I love you all." Grandmamma Dalila hugged her babies. Her heart felt like it was going to break, but she knew that they would have to go home to their families.

They hugged and kissed each other and wiped away many tears. Finally, they built up the strength to say those words they all dreaded, "Goodbye, Grandmamma Dalila."



Grandmamma Dalila picked up McKenzie who waved her little white fluffy paw at the children, before turning around to walk back to the old rusty SUV.

“Bye, bye, Grandmamma Dalila! We love you!” Grandmamma stopped. She felt totally empty.

Then she placed one foot in front of the other and slowly walked away. She heard the airplanes speeding down the runway and she imagined the unicorns standing on the wings. She knew that they would look after her babies and see to it that they had a safe flight home. She smiled knowing that the memories they had made would last forever. On the way home, the SUV didn’t hop and bounce along the road anymore. This time it just glided smoothly with a low and mournful mmmmmmmmmmmmm.



Other books by Petite Breaux

Slightly Bruised and A Little Broken, a memoir
The Whispering of My Heart, a short story

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