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# 1

## Pleasure Island

It is time for your departure,” Goél said in a quiet voice that was mild and yet at the same time strong. He looked around the small dining room, and a warm light filled his eyes. He put his gaze upon each of the five young men present and then looked directly across the table to where two girls completed the company of the Seven Sleepers.

Their leader did not make a kingly figure. He was dressed merely in a simple light gray robe. The hood was pushed back from his face, and his auburn hair caught the light from the lamp that illuminated the room. He seemed as much a simple workman as anything else, yet every member of the Seven Sleepers knew that this man had powers that could not be explained in natural ways.

Josh Adams, the leader of the Sleepers, sat studying Goél’s face. At the age of fourteen, Josh was tall and awkward. He was still shy, but his entire loyalty went to this one who had saved him and the others from death many times.

“Will you be going with us on our new mission, sire?”

“No, my Joshua. I have another mission, but you will find this task mostly to your liking, I’m sure. At least at the beginning.”

Bob Lee Jackson, always called Reb by his friends, was finishing a drink of refreshing tea from a large mug. He was the tallest of the boys. He was fifteen and

had light-blue eyes that appeared able to bore right through an object. He had removed the tall cowboy hat that he wore everywhere except when sleeping or at the table—and sometimes even then. Reb chuckled and said, “If I didn’t know you better, Goél, I’d think you were joking us. We’ve never had an assignment yet that was just fun.”

Josh knew that was true. The Seven Sleepers had come to Nuworld from the distant past. They had been placed in sleeping capsules by their parents just before Oldworld was destroyed by nuclear war. When they awoke many, many years later, they discovered that most of what they had known was gone. Life was completely different in Nuworld. But they soon gave their allegiance to Goél, who was fighting against the Dark Lord, an evil being who wanted to enslave everyone.

Goél perhaps was remembering this as he nodded. “Indeed, you have been hard pressed many times. You have not had an easy life in Nuworld. But—” he smiled quickly “—as you well know, it is the hard times that make men and women strong. Not the easy times.”

“Well, then, sire,” Jake Garfield put in, “we ought to be strong, because we’ve sure had some hard times.” Jake was a short boy of fourteen. He was of Jewish ancestry, he had red hair, and he had a quick, sharp wit. He was also great at inventing practically anything that he had the materials for. Jake grinned crookedly. “I agree with Reb here. You must be teasing us.”

Abigail Roberts, also fourteen, was the smallest of the Sleepers as well as the best looking. She had fair hair and eyes, blue as the sky. Unfortunately, she was somewhat proud of her good looks. Abbey said, “Is it really true, Goél? You’re going to give us a *vacation*?”

Before Goél could answer, Wash Jones—the young-

est Sleeper, a black boy of thirteen—grinned broadly. “A vacation! That’s what I need. I’d sure like to go somewhere where all I had to do was lie on my back and catch fish and then have somebody clean ’em and cook ’em for me.”

Goél laughed aloud. Josh had always suspected that their leader had a special fondness for Wash Jones. “That may be somewhere in your future, Wash. But I can understand why Jake and Josh are a little skeptical.”

Dave Cooper, a tall fifteen-year-old, was handsome enough to be a movie star, if there had been any movies in Nuworld. He had light brown hair and wide-spaced gray eyes. “Lead us to it, sire,” he said. “I’m ready.”

Goél then looked toward Josh’s close friend Sarah Collingwood.

Sarah was small and graceful. She had large brown eyes, very black hair, and was completely devoted to Goél.

“And what about you, daughter?” Goél asked. “Are you tired of fighting saber-toothed tigers and dragons?”

She managed a smile. “I think we all would welcome a vacation, sire, if you’re serious.”

Goél nodded and looked around at his young friends. “I am serious. I am sending you to Pleasure Island.”

“Pleasure Island!” Jake cried. “Is it anything like Coney Island? I mean are there carnival rides and stuff like that?”

The Sleepers began to fire questions at Goél, and Josh noticed that he managed to avoid most of them. He finally held up his hand, saying, “You have been in hard, dangerous places, but Pleasure Island has not yet

been infected by the Dark Lord.” A cloud seemed to go across his features. “I do not know how he has missed it, but no doubt he will find it someday. In any case, you will like the royal family. The king and queen are friends of mine. I should tell you that the king has had some difficulty, and I am hoping that you will be able to be of help to him as well as enjoy a vacation. That is my wish.”

“Is there a princess?” Dave wanted to know.

“Indeed there is. A very attractive one. Princess Cosima.”

“What is she like?” Abigail asked eagerly.

“I think she’s very much like . . . like Abigail. She loves to brush her hair and wear beautiful clothes.”

Everyone giggled at this, and Abbey herself blushed. “We’ll be good friends, sire.” She nodded vigorously. “I just know we will.”

“I trust that you will, indeed. Now—” Goél removed an envelope from a pocket. “Give this letter to the king. He will give you a good reception, I am sure.”

Josh, being the leader, was always trying to think ahead. “You mentioned a problem with the king that maybe we can help with. What is the problem? Is he sick?”

“No,” Goél said slowly. “He is healthy enough. Very strong and athletic in fact.”

“What is it, then?” Josh asked.

“He is subject to fits of discouragement, I’m sorry to say,” Goél told them sadly. Then he straightened his shoulders and added, “But he is a good man. He belongs to the House of Goél, and you will find him kind, I’m sure. Now—” he got to his feet “—come. The ship awaits.”

In a short time the Sleepers were standing on the

shore beside a beautiful ship with the name *Eagle* on the side. The sails were furled, but the sailors stood ready to set them as soon as the passengers were on board.

“You will have a safe voyage, my young friends.” Smiling, Goél went around and shook hands with each of them. He also looked deeply into the eyes of each one.

His gaze somehow made Josh feel that he was being searched. He supposed they all felt that way.

*It's always like that,* he thought after their leader had shaken his hand and looked into his eyes. *I feel as if he looks right down to the inside of me and knows what's going on. Makes a fellow uncomfortable sometimes. But, knowing Goél, you know he means only good.*

The Sleepers boarded, and the captain—Captain Leland, they learned—said, “Your baggage is all aboard. Are you ready?”

“Let's go, Captain. Take us to Pleasure Island!” Jake cried.

The captain shouted, “Weigh anchor! Hoist sails!”

Very quickly the *Eagle* caught the breeze and sailed out of the harbor. The Sleepers all gathered in the stern of the ship and watched Goél as they swiftly moved toward the sea. He grew smaller and smaller, and Josh said with a sigh, “I wish he were going with us, Sarah.”

“So do I.” Then she reached over and poked Josh's arm. “But we're going to have a great vacation. Our first vacation in Nuworld.”

The voyage on the *Eagle* was pleasant. There were no storms, and day followed day, filled with bright sun-

shine and a brisk warm breeze. The Sleepers enjoyed their sea voyage thoroughly.

Jake even rigged a line and managed to hook a shark, which nearly pulled him overboard.

“Let go of that line!” Josh screeched and made a grab for Jake as the shark was tugging him over the rail.

“That’s my shark!” Jake yelled back.

Josh pulled his friend’s hands loose from the line just in time and watched it disappear in the sea.

“That thing would have you for lunch. Let’s bait up again. Maybe we can catch something that’s both good to eat and safe to catch.”

Later they did indeed catch a fine marlin, which proved to be good eating.

The ship was comfortable, but it was small. By the time Captain Leland alerted them with, “Land just off the port bow!” Josh—and everyone else—was eager to set foot on land again.

The *Eagle* drifted into a beautiful harbor.

“Look at that beach!” Josh breathed. “Nothing but white sand as far as you can see.”

“It was like this on the beaches in Florida back in Oldworld,” Abbey said. “My family and I used to vacation there every summer. And see, there are lots of people out on the beach getting tans. I can’t wait! I want to get the best tan I’ve ever had!”

But Josh turned to Sarah. “You’ll have to be careful, Sarah, and so will I. You remember how badly we sunburned when we were in Trabango? And you don’t even burn easily.”

“Yes, I sure do remember,” she said. “We don’t want any more of that.”

The crew made the ship fast to a dock, and the Sleepers soon stood wishing farewell to their captain.



Captain Leland looked around with envy. "Wish I could stay with you. Pleasure Island. Sounds like a good place to be these days."

"Why don't you stay, Captain?"

"Under orders from Goél. Got to do my duty. But you youngsters have a great time. From what I hear, you deserve it."

After the farewells, Josh looked around him and said, "I guess we'd better find our way to the palace. Let's shoulder this gear."

"Can't we hire someone to carry all this?" Abbey said. "We're on a vacation!"

"You're right. We'll do that," Josh said.

Soon he had hired a man with a large cart pulled by a sturdy horse to haul their equipment. "We need to get to the palace. Do you know the way there?"

"Indeed I do. This way, sir."

They started inland and soon were all exclaiming over the beauty of Pleasure Island.

"This is a beautiful place!" Dave marveled. "Beautiful trees, beautiful sky, the homes are nice, the people are so attractive."

"A little different from what we usually find," Reb said. He suddenly said, "And look at these horses coming!"

Two riders swept by, sitting on the backs of unusually beautiful horses.

"I bet they'll win a race or two in their time," Reb said with admiration. "I'd sure like to straddle a horse again."

"Well, maybe you can play cowboy here," Jake said. "I'd like to see what kind of science they've got going on Pleasure Island."

"And I'd like to know if they have parties and things like that," Abbey said.

They made their way steadily onward, led by the helpful man with the horse and wagon.

Josh was walking with Sarah. "Have you noticed all the posters that we've been passing, Sarah?" he asked after a while.

"I have. They seem to have a lot of sports events on Pleasure Island, don't they?"

Indeed the walls of most buildings they passed were covered with announcements of all sorts of athletic contests. There were horse races, ball games, and even some sporting events that Josh had never heard of.

"They certainly do believe in games in this place," he said.

"And parties and musical events too. I've seen half a dozen notices for balls and concerts and plays and things like that."

Dave came up to walk with them just then. He was grinning. "So this is Pleasure Island. It beats having to fight a T-rex before breakfast."

Josh remembered. The Sleepers had been in lands where they had to battle dinosaurs and, even worse, sorcerers and magicians skilled in the dark arts. Pleasure Island was definitely better.

Then they arrived at the palace. They stood before a magnificent building that rose at least five stories toward the sky. It was spread out over large grounds and was surrounded by a low alabaster wall. Inside the wall were gardens and fountains, and young people everywhere were engaged in various games. Some were playing tennis. Others were hitting a golf ball around. Play, Josh decided, was the order of the day on Pleasure Island.

When they reached the front gates, Josh went up

to a guard, who was dressed in white and scarlet. "I have a letter for His Majesty King Leo."

"If you will come into the reception hall, I will see if the king is available."

The Sleepers followed the attendant and soon were wandering about an elegant room. It was filled with beautifully constructed furniture, colorful pictures hung on the walls, and lights gleamed everywhere. They were served refreshments without being asked if they wanted any. The snacks consisted of a delicious cool drink that no one could identify and small cakes that melted in the mouth.

"I could get used to this in a hurry," Reb said. He took another swallow of the drink and said, "This is even better than Pepsi!"

The attendant came back, smiling. "The royal family will receive you. If you will come this way, please."

The Sleepers left the large reception room and followed the man down a wide hallway. It made several turns before they came to a door attended by two more guards, also in red and white. They swung open the doors, and the Seven Sleepers marched in.

They all gasped. This room made the other seem small by contrast. It stretched out in every direction. And there before them, seated across the room, were four people.

"I have your letter from Goél." The speaker was obviously the ruler. "I am King Leo," he identified himself. "And this is my queen, Tamsin." He gestured then to a beautiful young girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. "This is my daughter, Princess Cosima. And my son, Prince Derek."

Cosima looked about fourteen and Prince Derek possibly twenty. All of the family was attractive.

As leader, Josh spoke first, saying awkwardly, "You'll have to forgive us, Your Majesty. We don't know how to behave in the presence of royalty. Do we just bow or do you wish us to kneel?"

"Neither is at all necessary. You come as friends of Goél. That is sufficient. For state occasions we might show a little more formality. But come, sit, and we will have refreshments. We appreciate your visit, and we want to hear about your adventures."

Soon the Sleepers were all seated, and indeed the royal family did seem interested in hearing everything about them.

Prince Derek seemed to study them thoughtfully, but he said little for a time. When he did speak up, he said with a smile, "We've heard much about the Seven Sleepers, and I must admit I expected someone older."

Josh grinned. "People always say that. Well, we will be older someday."

The prince grinned. "I hope you will have a long stay with us. By the way, I'm entered in a race today. I would like it if you would be my guest in the royal box."

"A horse race or a footrace?" Reb asked quickly.

"A horse race, as a matter of fact. Are you interested in horses?"

"He's the best horseman you've ever seen, Prince Derek," Sarah said.

"Indeed! Well, that touches my pride! We shall have to look into that. Perhaps he and I could have a private race."

"We'd be glad to join you in your box, Prince Derek," Josh said quickly.

"And tonight there is a ball." Princess Cosima was beaming. "You all must come. It is going to be absolute-

ly fabulous. There will be many young people and music and entertainment.”

“Oh, but we can’t come!” Abbey said with disappointment written all over her face.

“Why is that?” the princess asked, surprised. “Have you other plans?”

“We didn’t bring any party clothes! I don’t have a single long dress—nor does Sarah.”

“Oh, is that all? That is easily taken care of!” Princess Cosima looked relieved. “We can have the royal tailors fit them, can’t we, Mother?”

“Certainly! It will be no trouble at all. And they are swift workers.”

“Then it is all arranged,” the princess said. “Now, girls, come with me. We shall talk about what kind of dresses the tailors can make up for you in a hurry.”

An attendant showed the boys to their quarters, and each of them was given a private room. As usual, however, they managed to get together in the sitting area to talk about their situation.

“This is about the best thing I’ve run into since I won the bronc-riding contest in Texas,” Reb said. He looked around at the luxurious room and sighed. “What a relief! No problems. No dangers. Just have fun.”

Josh found himself tremendously relieved. He was tired of responsibility and tired of tension. He expelled a breath and flopped into an overstuffed chair. “You’re right about that, Reb. Looks to me like we’re going to have a great time here on Pleasure Island. No dragons, no dangers, nothing but fun and games!”



## 2

# The Cat Climbing Contest

The arena was the most magnificent structure that the Sleepers had yet seen in Nuworld. It was of light gray marble and was built in a circle.

“This looks like the pictures I saw of the old Coliseum back in Oldworld,” Josh said.

The Sleepers were settled in the box reserved for the king and his family. As Josh looked around, he saw that the huge stadium was packed with people in brilliant clothing. Below, a racetrack ran around the outer edge of the arena floor, and green grass grew in the middle.

“Looks like a big football stadium,” Jake said. “Well, they sure take their sports seriously here.”

Sarah and Abbey were much more interested in the large royal box than they were in the actual floor of the arena. For a time they wandered about, escorted by Princess Cosima. The king and queen apparently were not coming, but the princess seemed delighted to show them around.

“We have any kind of refreshment here that you like,” the princess said. She nodded to a white-coated attendant, who smiled back at her. “Just ask for it, and you can have it.”

“Do you have any hotdogs?” Sarah asked with a little smile. She knew full well that they would never have heard of this delicacy.

The attendant frowned in puzzlement. “Hotdogs? I’m afraid I don’t know that one, miss.”

“It’s what they used to call a kind of sandwich a long time ago,” Sarah said with a glance at Abbey. “Do you have any lemonade, then?”

The attendant listened as Sarah described lemonade. Then he brightened. “We have something very much like that.” He quickly concocted a drink, filled a glass, and handed the icy beverage to her. “I hope this suits you, ma’am.”

Sarah tasted it. “Delicious!” she said. “As good as I’ve ever had.”

As Sarah sipped her drink, Abbey was talking excitedly with the princess. “I’m so thrilled that you asked us to the ball! What sort of occasion is it?”

The princess looked puzzled. “Occasion? It’s . . . a ball.”

“Well, I mean,” Abbey said, “is it to celebrate something? Is it a special event?”

Cosima laughed at that. “Every ball is a special event.”

“Do you have them often?” Abbey asked.

“Oh, not too often. Sometimes three or four days will pass without a ball.”

“Three or four days!” Abbey was astonished. “I’ve never heard of so many balls.”

“Is that many?” Princess Cosima seemed truly puzzled. “How often do you have balls where you come from?”

Abbey muttered, “Well, we haven’t had any at all lately. But back where I used to live—in Oldworld—we might have what you would call a ball once or twice a year.”

“Once or twice a year!” Cosima appeared stunned. “That’s terrible! How did you live between balls?”

“Oh, we managed,” Abbey said. “But I like it better



the way you do it here on Pleasure Island. I'm so anxious to see the dress that your tailors are making for me."

"We'll leave the arena early—as soon as Derek wins his race. I'm sure you'd rather look at dresses and shoes than to watch horses running around in a circle. Although Derek is awfully good at it. We're all very proud of him."

Down in the lower level of the arena, Reb Jackson stood beside the prince, who was stroking the nose of a beautiful mottled-gray horse.

"This is Thunder," Prince Derek said. The horse suddenly nipped at his hair, and he dodged. "Now, now, I'm not an apple for you to bite on!" he said. He laughed and ran a hand over the silky mane. "He's never lost a race—which means I have never lost a race since I've had him."

"He's some horse," Reb said with admiration. "Don't know as I ever saw a finer one."

"I'll tell you what we can do, Reb. Tomorrow we'll go to the stables. There's a horse there that I think you would like very much. The only trouble is that he's difficult to handle. Not many can stay on his back, but . . ."

"Well, that's my kind of horse!" Reb said. He felt excitement well up inside him at the very thought. "I wouldn't want a horse that wouldn't put up a fight every time somebody tried to get on his back."

"You certainly won't have that trouble with Lightning," the prince said, grinning. "He tries to pulverize every rider. As a matter of fact, there are only two men that can ride him. Myself and one other."

"Better make that three," Reb said with a nod.

Derek clapped him on the shoulder. “Well, come on. Let’s go upstairs and join the rest of the family. I’ll introduce you to Lightning tomorrow.”

The two of them started climbing up to the level where the royal box was located.

“Hello. I won—as you saw,” Derek said.

Everyone crowded around the prince, telling him what a magnificent ride he had made. He shrugged them off with a grin, saying, “It all depends on the horse. I have the best. And now it’s about time for the cat-climbing contest. I want to see that.”

“About time for *what?*” Josh exclaimed, not believing his ears.

“The cat-climbing contest.” Princess Cosima smiled brightly. “Don’t you have that in your world?”

“Not that I know of.” Reb scratched his head. “What is it?”

“Come over here,” Prince Derek said. “I’ll show you.” He led them to the edge of the royal box, where they could look down on the arena. “See? They have the climbing poles already planted.”

Josh and the other Sleepers looked downward. Six poles rose some twenty feet in the air. They looked like large telephone poles to Josh. On top of each was a small platform with something placed on it.

“What’s that on top of the poles?” Dave asked. “I can’t make it out what it is.”

“Oh, that’s the food. Goodies for the cats,” Princess Cosima said.

“That’s the only way they get fed. They’re trained that way,” Derek explained. “And they’re kept quite hungry just before a contest like this.”

“You mean they have a race to see which cat can get to the top first?” Josh was amazed.

“Exactly! I can’t believe they don’t have this kind of competition where you come from?”

“Never heard of such a thing,” Josh murmured. “Is it a timed contest?”

“Oh yes. The first cat to reach the top and the food is the winner. The poles have been oiled to make the climbing more difficult.”

“The cat climb is a very important event today,” Princess Cosima said. “The betting is high.”

“Did you put down a bet, Cosima?” her brother asked.

“Yes, but only a thousand finnigs.”

“Uh . . . *finnig*? Is that what you call your dollars?” Josh asked.

“I suppose so,” the prince said. “If dollars are money.”

“And you bet a thousand of them on a cat climbing a pole, princess?”

“I do usually bet more,” Cosima said. “But it’s going to be a close contest. I wasn’t quite sure.”

“I looked at the odds,” Derek said. “I picked Black Diamond. He’s had a good season.”

As they watched, the cats were brought to the foot of the poles by their owners and held there. The princess and the prince continued to talk about their climbing qualities. Josh listened to them, totally astonished.

“They just look like big alley cats to me—lean and muscular.” Reb murmured. “This is funny. They talk about those cats as if they were horses.”

By now Josh was feeling stunned. He whispered to Sarah, “They do take their sports seriously on

Pleasure Island. Anybody that would bet on a cat climbing a pole would bet on anything.”

“Time for them to go,” the prince announced. “Now let’s see who’s the champion. This is only the semifinal, though,” he added. “The grand championship will be next week.”

“Yes, I’m planning to bet a lot of money on that,” the princess said.

The cat-climbing contest was not particularly exciting to anyone in the royal box except the prince and the princess. But Josh watched as, at a given signal, the cats were released and began scrambling up the poles. The crowd went wild. He looked at the princess. She was screaming and waving her arms.

Leaning toward Wash, he said, “There’s something wrong with this place. Anybody that would bet on *cats* like this has to be crazy.”

“Black Diamond won!” Cosima cried. “I won, and I’m going to collect my winnings! Now I just wish I had bet more. Come with me, Sarah. You and Abbey come with me.”

The girls left, and the boys stayed with Derek. Other contests would follow, Derek said, including footraces and wrestling.

“I guess you have just about every kind of sporting event there is, Prince Derek,” Jake said.

“We do like our sports on Pleasure Island. They are very important to our people. They take sports seriously.”

*Too seriously?* Josh wondered.

Down on a lower level, the girls approached a row of elevated cages. People were lined up before them, receiving money.

“Just stay with me,” Cosima told Sarah and Abbey. “We’ll soon have enough money to do anything we want to for the rest of the day.”

Sarah watched the princess collect her winnings, all in coins. She put them in a large white leather bag and turned around, triumphant. “Now, let’s go spend it!”

Sarah was not as excited about this as Abbey was. For one thing, she had been watching a poorly dressed man standing by one of the nearby pillars that supported the upper levels. What caught her attention was his face. It was as pale as ashes. Then another man spoke to him, and Sarah heard, “What’s wrong, Garold?”

“I lost it all! I lost everything! I bet on Raffles. Everything I had.”

“Never mind. There’s another race. You can bet again and win it back.”

“But I have nothing left to bet! I gave my house for security. Now I can’t pay for it. My family and I will be out on the streets.”

The second man drifted away, after muttering a few words of comfort.

“Look there, princess,” Sarah said. “That poor man lost everything he had.”

“What’s that?” Cosima said absently. She gave the man a careless look. “Oh. Well, of course, somebody has to lose. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be any fun. I lose myself sometimes.”

“I don’t think that’s quite the same thing,” Sarah said thoughtfully.

“Whatever can you mean?” Cosima stared at her with astonishment. “Of course it’s the same. I lose. He loses.”

“I mean that you’re very wealthy. And if you bet and lose, you can just go to your father to get more money. But that poor man’s lost his house.”

“Oh, I understand that. But there’s plenty of work. He can work and save up and buy another house.”

Sarah stared at the beautiful girl with astonishment. Cosima had not seemed to be a heartless person, but Sarah saw that she was totally blind as far as the poor man’s plight was concerned.

Sarah decided she would risk telling Cosima what she thought. “It seems to me that your people take gambling so . . . seriously.”

“It’s just good sport!” Cosima cried. “Didn’t they have things like this in your world?”

“Yes, they did.”

“Well, it’s all the same, then. It’s just for fun.”

Sarah did not agree that the gambling part was just fun, but she said no more.

“Come, girls. Let’s go shopping,” Cosima said gaily.

And shopping they did go. For the next two hours, Sarah and Abbey were taken on a whirlwind tour of shops. The princess could not spend her winnings fast enough. She bought seven pairs of shoes.

Sarah was amazed. “Don’t you have any shoes?”

“Oh, certainly. I have more than three hundred pairs.”

“Three hundred pairs! Then why do you need more?”

The princess appeared bewildered that she should ask. “Oh, I don’t know. Some people collect some things, and I collect shoes.”

From then on, Sarah watched in silence as the princess spent all the money that she had won. She had boxes of clothes and shoes—including some she had bought for Sarah and Abbey.

Abbey, of course, was terribly excited. She whispered, "Isn't this wonderful, Sarah?"

"It's wonderful for the winners," Sarah said quietly.

"I can't wait to put on my new clothes. That ball is going to be fabulous."

The ball was indeed fabulous, if fabulous meant expensive parties. Josh stood to one side with Wash and Reb, watching the activity. The ballroom was packed with young people and older people as well. The women's bright dresses—reds, yellows, greens, blues—made a kaleidoscope of color. The music came from orchestras that were posted high on balconies. It appeared to Josh that all the Sleepers were stunned by the lavishness of it all.

"This is some set-to, ain't it, now?" Reb marveled. "I been to two county fairs and three snake stompin's," he remarked, "but I ain't ever seen nothing like this."

Wash had just come back from the refreshment table, and he had both hands full. "I don't know what all this stuff is, but it sure does taste good! It's all free too."

"No, I don't think it is free," Josh said. "Somebody's got to pay for it."

"Well, the king pays for it, I guess."

"And where does the king get the money to pay for it?" Dave asked with a crooked grin.

"Never thought about it," Wash said.

"He taxes the people."

"That's right," Josh put in. "So no matter whether the people are here or not, they pay for these fancy balls."

"Looks like they have some kind of special entertainment coming up again," Dave said.

This time it was a juggler, who was marvelous indeed. He kept at least twenty balls in the air at the same time. At other times he threw lighted torches and caught them, seemingly with ease.

Following this there was a short play, then more dancing.

“This is just wonderful, isn’t it, Sarah?” Abbey had been conversing with a tall, blond-haired young man.

Sarah said, “I can see it’s going to be very tiring. We’ll be ready for bed tonight. Early.”

But they did not get to bed early. Food continued to be brought in, the entertainment continued, the ball went on, and it seemed as if it would go on until morning.

Finally Josh found Sarah and said, “I can’t take any more of this, Sarah. I’m falling to pieces, I’m so tired.”

“So am I.”

“We’d better pull our people out of here.”

“I expect you’re right. From what the princess said, there’ll be another day at the arena tomorrow—and another party tomorrow night!”

“They’ve scheduled events I never even heard of,” Josh groaned. “Even worse than cat climbing. And these people bet on everything!”

Josh soon found that all the Sleepers were ready to go except Abbey. She protested, but he insisted. “Tomorrow’s another day, Abbey. There’ll be another ball to go to—I’m afraid.”

“Isn’t this exciting! There’s always something going on! This is the best place I’ve ever been, Josh!”

Josh looked at her and then over at the merry-makers. He sighed. “I think a thing like this could get old very soon.”



Abbey looked back at him as if he had said something insane. “Get old! Why, I would *never* get tired of it if I lived to be a hundred!”

“We’ll see,” Josh said. “Now, let’s go get some sleep. We’re all worn out.”

