

Gnomania

The clock was ticking. I could hear it. I was waiting until it was 6:45:02, the exact time Alarm was supposed to go off.

The ticking got louder. I shut my eyes and stuffed my face in my pillow. At least it was a little quieter now. “Kait, Kait, Kait,” he whispered, “Wake up, wake up, wake up!”

Now it was 6:45:02. I covered my ears and waited for the shrill, “BEEEEEEEEEP!” But that noise never came.

I looked around, worried. “Alarm?” I whispered. “Alarm, hello? Alarm?”

Alarm sighed dramatically. “Kait,” he said, “I don’t feel very well. Please, please, Kait put your ear up to my speaker and listen to see if I’m okay.”

I put my ear up to his speaker and listened intently.

BEEEEEEEEEP!

“Yikes!” I screamed, and accidentally dropped Alarm.

“Ouch!” Alarm moaned as he landed on the wood floor.

“Sorry. Just don’t play tricks on me. Now apologize.”

“I won’t!” Alarm retorted. “That was quite fun! I will not apologize for having fun!”

I sighed and left my room. Did I ever mention that I’m able to communicate with mechanical things? I mean, cell phones, iPods, VCRs, radios, television sets, alarm clocks, that kind of stuff. They often trick me because I’m the only one in the household who can do this. And probably, I’m the only one in the world.

I’ve kept my amazing power all to myself for five whole years. I’m ten, nearly eleven, and I discovered my power when I was five. So that’s five years.

I kept it a secret because I know if Mom or Dad found out, they’d do one of two things:

1. Send me to a wizard school where there are creepy teachers, creepy kids, and creepy food. I know I wouldn’t fit in because I’m not a witch, just a kid with an abnormal power.

2. Or they’d have Grandma Marion come over, who IS a witch, and would teach me witchcraft and other scary stuff similar to witchcraft.

Basically, I don’t want either of these things to happen to me, so I just didn’t mention my power to anyone at all.

When I got downstairs, I ate my breakfast, and packed my school stuff. Then I went back upstairs and got dressed.

“Kait, please put me back on the nightstand,” said Alarm. He sounded impatient.

I sighed, and placed Alarm back on the nightstand. He vibrated along the way, but I held on tight and ignored it.

I bounded down the steps. I took a quick glance at the clock in the hallway as I picked up my backpack. “7:52!” Clocky shouted. I was only seven minutes late.

“Bye Mom! Bye Dad!” I yanked open the door, ran out, and slammed it shut. Then I started running. I couldn’t be late for school.

I was still sprinting and panting. But I got tired, so I sat in someone's lawn and rested.

Then I saw two grubby hands come right out of the ground. I screamed and ran, but the hands got my feet. I tried to grab the hands and take them off me, but I didn't succeed. Whoever was holding me was too strong.

"Help!" I screamed. I didn't know what to do. My thoughts were all mashed together, and I couldn't think straight. Panic tugged at my mind. It was getting harder to breathe. All I saw was brown mush. I waved my hand in the air. It was the only part of me that hadn't been dragged down in this hole. No one saw my hand, unfortunately. I was engulfed in brown dirt. Then someone hit me on the head with something hard, and I thought it was all over. But it wasn't.

I still had my eyes closed, but I was wide-awake. I was waiting until it was 6:45:02. Alarm was supposed to go off soon.

I had convinced myself that this whole "being dragged underground by some hands" thingy was a dream. When I opened my eyes, I expected to see my room. I would see the lavender walls and I would find myself in my purple bed. Everything would be okay. So I opened my eyes.

And I wasn't! I wasn't at home, I wasn't in my room, I wasn't even in a bed! I was in...I don't know. Something like a cage...no, a jail cell. A cage/jail cell.

My thoughts were interrupted by a loud, "BEEEEEEEEEP!" For a moment, I thought it was Alarm. Well, it was actually a motion sensor.

"She's awakened!" a deep voice boomed. "Bring her to me!"

There was the sound of running feet, and a small person arrived at the door. I backed up in fear as he unlocked my door.

"Come along," the small person said. "We must take you to the king!"

He held my hand and dragged me. I recognized his hands. They were the same hand that had pulled me down here. They had the same strong, iron grip. I noticed the club he was holding. It had dirt on it, so it must have been the same club he knocked me out with in the tunnel.

After a minute that seemed like an hour, he let go. I was in front of another small person. Except this time, the small person was on a throne. He had a crown, too. I was sure he was the king.

"Welcome!" the king of small people shouted. "Welcome to Gnomania."

I nodded, because there was nothing else I could do.

"First," he continued, "We shall go over the rules. There will be no disobeying. You will answer all questions truthfully. And...there will be no, absolutely NO escaping. Got it?"

"Uh, uh, yes. I suppose. I mean, I...uh...yes?"

"That was not a question, was it?"

"Um...no." I was really nervous. What if I HAD to escape? What would be the penalty?

As if he could read my mind, the king said, "If you do not follow these rules, the consequence is death." He said the "th" part quietly and mysteriously.

“Let me explain why you were brought here, to the land of gnomes. Knuckles, my trusted companion,” Knuckles, the one who dragged me down here, blushed at the mention of his name, “took you here so you could fix all of our problems with your TALENT.”

“I don’t have a talent,” I denied. “I’m just a regular girl. I do excel in social studies, but otherwise, I’m regular.”

The king’s face got so red and angry, I thought he would just kill me on the spot. Fortunately, he didn’t. Instead, he said, “Never, never lie to us. Now, I sent one gnome to spy on you, and he SAW you talk to that alarm clock, and talk to that regular clock. I have proof! So never, never LIE!”

I nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Now back to your talent,” said the king. “You can talk to mechanical things. We are having problems with mechanical things. Do you see a connection?”

I sighed. “Yes.”

“You are to fix our things by the end of 2 weeks. If you do not, we shall kill you. Is this understood?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Good. You will start work tomorrow. Take her away, Knuckles.”

Knuckles grabbed my hand again and took me to my cage/jail cell.

When I was alone, I started feeling...not so good.

There were two ways for me to die. The first was disobey orders, and the second was don’t fix stuff.

I sighed. I really wanted to escape now since I knew I’d most likely get killed. I couldn’t escape, though! The place was underground! And they had a motion sensor on me!

I tried to fall asleep even though it was still early in the morning. I put my head down on the ground and started to think again. If I were to escape, where would I go? Home? But if I went home, my parents would wonder where I had been. I would have to tell the truth. And the truth is, that I was dragged down here because the gnomes wanted to use me. Because I had a power that I had kept secret from them for five years. I would have to tell Mom and Dad about my power, and then they’d send me to a wizard school! Or Grandma Marion’d come!

As I was thinking, I heard the sound of running feet again. Knuckles arrived at the door and said, “I have been sent by the king to give you a message...” he paused, then he continued. “If you do escape, which you should most definitely not, then you will be forced to tell your parents about your power. We gnomes have a way.”

Then Knuckles walked away. “Wait!” I shouted.

“What?” Knuckles glared at me.

“How will I be *forced* to tell my parents about this? I can say whatever I want, and you can’t control that.”

Knuckles gave me another glare, and repeated, “We gnomes have a way. Understood?”

I didn’t say anything. I didn’t want to say yes, and I couldn’t say no. I just nodded at Knuckles. But really, in my mind, I was shaking my head no at him. I *would* escape, and I *would not* tell my parents about my secret. Or anybody else. Unless they already knew.

The next day I woke up feeling tired. I had hardly gotten any sleep last night, because it was impossible to sleep on a hard concrete floor without a pillow or a blanket.

I sat up, and the motion sensor went off. I didn't really care that the sound was super loud and it made all the other gnomes wake up.

The king yelled, "She is awake! Make her start work!"

A couple seconds later, Knuckles came to the door and unlocked the cage/jail cell. "Come along," he grunted. I rubbed my eyes and stood up, and he took me to the king. I yawned along the way. I was still quite groggy and not ready to work.

I finally arrived at the king. He nodded and smiled as I walked up to him. When I got there he said, "Today, you begin work. *Every* mechanical item in this city has a problem. In all, we have over 1,000 mechanical items. You are to fix all of them."

He paused so I could respond. "Yes, sir," I said. I had a feeling that if I didn't agree with this guy, something terrible would happen to me.

"You shall start with the television," said the king.

I nodded, and headed over there. I looked at the television. I could just tell by the way he smiled at all the gnomes that he was perfectly happy and healthy. He was just a little troublesome. He liked to play tricks on the gnomes, and they fell for all of them.

I frowned. Trying to convince playful things to be calm is harder than nursing sick things back to health. I'm not very good at persuading people (or things) to do stuff, so I had a feeling I wasn't going to do too well with the television.

"Get to work, don't just stand there!" said a very short gnome.

So I got to work. I yawned again, and said, "Hi."

The television said, "Hi."

Then I waited for the television to say something because it's easier when someone else starts the conversation. But he didn't say anything. So I started it.

"I hear you're not working."

"Yeah," he said.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because I hate King King and I will NOT work for him!"

I understood perfectly. Alarm never listens to me.

"I know, but if you were someone who wanted to watch a program, and your television wasn't working, wouldn't you be mad?"

"Yes."

"Wouldn't you want it to work?"

"Yes."

"So work! Please!"

He sighed at me. "If you say so."

The television worked for about two minutes and all the gnomes hugged me and sang and rejoiced. But then the television stopped working. All the gnomes pinched me and stomped on my toes and hit me. I went back over to the television and asked him why he wasn't working.

He said, "I remembered that I hate King King."

I sighed, and continued talking with him.

By the end of the day, I was really exhausted. The television didn't like to work, and it took me *forever* to finally convince him that he *must* work. I was too busy with the television, I didn't get to talk to any other items. So if I did one a day, that still wouldn't be enough! How could I do 1,000 in 14 days? And now it was 13 days, since today was nearly over.

I thought more and more, but no plans came to my mind. I just decided to sleep since I was really tired.

I closed my eyes. But it was impossible to sleep because whoever was in the cage/jail cell next to me was making a clanking noise. I tried to block out the sound, but it was too loud. So I sat up and walked to the side of my cage/jail cell.

"Would you mind being a little..." I couldn't finish my sentence. I was too surprised.

I was staring at...another gnome, I suppose. Except this one was a girl! I hadn't seen a female gnome anywhere in Gnomania so far. She had straight, black, shoulder-length hair, and slightly slanted black eyes. She also had pointy ears. She was wearing a curly, pointy, hat and had the same curly, pointy shoes. Her dress was made of different things like flower petals, patches of denim, and animal fur. But what I was the most surprised at was that she also had a motion sensor in her room. And she was picking at it with a wrench.

"Who are you?" I asked. I didn't know what else to say.

"Me?" asked the gnome, as she put her wrench down. "I'm Veronica."

"Nice to meet you." I said. Except it sounded more like "Nice to meet you?" since I was sort of nervous.

"And you too." Veronica didn't seem very interested in me because she didn't even look my way. She just continued picking at the motion sensor.

I wanted to have at least one friend while I was in Gnomania, so I tried for the third time. "Why are you trying to destroy that motion sensor?"

"So they won't know when I escape tonight. I need to ruin it now because they turn them on at 9:00 sharp. It's 8:47 right now."

"You're escaping?" I thought Veronica must be one brave gnome to escape.

"Why, of course."

"Well," I said. "Didn't they say they'd harm you or something if you escaped?"

"Yes, but I don't mind. King King said he'd put a curse on me if I escaped. But I'd rather have bad luck with every step I took than be stuck here for the rest of my life."

"The king's name is King King?"

"Yes. I find it very funny."

"Me too."

Veronica and I had a long talk. I found out that she actually wasn't a gnome; she was an elf. That explained her pointed ears and slanted eyes. She had a talent, too. It was clothing. Veronica could magically pull any clothing item out of thin air. She said there was a time when she was dragged down, too. She had to make clothing for every citizen of Gnomania, and she did it.

"Why weren't you released? You did the job," I said.

Veronica looked serious. "King King loved my talent. He said it would benefit so many Gnomans. So he kept me. And now the work never ends. I've had enough so now I'm leaving."

Then Veronica continued to tear down the motion sensor. She took out the most essential part and then replaced it with a fake one.

“That ought to do it,” she said.

I looked at the floor. I had just made a friend and now she was escaping and leaving me here with the evil King King. I had to stop her! She knew so much about Gnomania, and I needed all the information I could get to plan *my* escape.

Veronica was picking at the door now. “Wait!” I said. “Don’t go!”

“I must,” she replied.

“But I...If you leave...if you leave, I’ll be left alone. And I’ll probably die because I can’t fix 1,000 mechanical items in 13 days. If I escape, the only place I’ll be able to go is home, and then, I’d have to tell my parents about my talent. It’s a dead end either way. So please, just stay here so I have company and someone to talk to.”

I think Veronica was a little moved by my short speech. So she quit fiddling with the lock on the door, and she looked at me. “Sure,” she said. “We’re a team. I help you, you help me.”

I went to bed a little later that night because I talked to Veronica more. We just talked about our interests and regular stuff like that. Then we both decided to go to bed and get ready for another not-so-fun day tomorrow.

The next six days went the same as the first day. Except they served us breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Breakfast was mushy oatmeal that wasn’t too bad, lunch was a sandwich with lettuce, tomato, and some weird sauce in it, and dinner was two slices of cheese pizza with olives, jalapenos, and onions. I hated the vegetables on it, so I just took them off.

In those six days, I fixed five items: a radio, a computer, a house phone, a video game, and an alarm clock. The alarm clock didn’t like to agree with anyone, so it took me two days to fix him. At this rate, I was never going to make it. It was a good thing I was planning on escaping soon.

At the beginning of the second week Veronica and I started planning our escape. On the first night we worked on the motion sensors.

“They’re the toughest thing to break,” said Veronica. “They’re made by those super strong gnomes, so it’s hard to do the cracking part, let alone the pulling off part.”

Veronica told me what to do. She gave me the wrench and I started hitting the sensor. I pretended it was an egg.

“Harder!” exclaimed Veronica.

I hit it harder. I saw a little crack in the sensor.

“A bit harder!”

I gave it a huge hit, and the crack got bigger.

“Good,” Veronica complimented. “Now just put your finger in there,” she pointed to the crack, “and pull.”

I forced my finger into the crack and pulled, but nothing happened. I tried again. Nothing. Again. Nothing.

“I can’t!” I told the elf. “It’s stuck on good.”

Veronica sighed and then mumbled something. A white scarf appeared out of nowhere. Then she pointed at the sensor and the white scarf wrapped around the part I was trying to remove.

“Pullosos,” said Veronica, and the scarf pulled the piece out.

“Uh...wow,” I said. I thought Veronica could only make clothing! I didn’t know she could make it do neat stuff!

Now Veronica was folding the scarf. She tossed it to me.

“I glued it together in the same shape as that part of the motion sensor. Now just put that in where the old part used to be.”

I replaced that part of the motion sensor with the white scarf. “Nobody will know the difference,” I said to myself.

The next day went like the rest. Oatmeal mush for breakfast, lettuce and tomato sandwich for lunch, and cheese pizza for dinner. I fixed an iPod. Then at night, Veronica and I worked on the second half of our escape. Tomorrow night we would go.

I entered the cage/jail cell with a pained look on my face. To talk to the iPod, I had to put the headphones on my ears. The iPod kept blasting music, and I had that stupid Gnomanian song stuck in my head. It was really annoying because it sounded like the chicken dance.

“Long day?” asked Veronica.

“Totally,” I replied.

We waited a little until it was nearly dark. It was around 8:30 when Veronica and I started working on the locks.

“Put your fingernail in,” she said.

I put my fingernail in the lock and twisted. Since I have short fingernails, it wasn’t really working.

“I can’t do it,” I said.

“Yes, you can,” said Veronica. “Just try again.”

I tried again, but didn’t succeed.

“Do you have a paper clip?” I thought I could use the paper clip as a key.

“No.”

“Then...” I thought a while. Veronica’s talent was clothing. Maybe she could make a scarf for me, and then I’d use it as a key. “Then can you make another scarf?”

“Yes!” Veronica exclaimed. “That’s a great idea!”

Veronica said, “Scaffocatus!” and pointed at the wall. I saw a sparkly silver and gray scarf appear. Then she did a circular movement with her arms that looked pretty silly. But it made the scarf go into the keyhole and circle around and around until it unlocked.

“We’re done for tonight,” said Veronica. “Tomorrow night we escape.”

While Veronica and I were sleeping peacefully, a meeting was taking place in the king’s private sitting room.

“I have a funny feeling about those two,” said King King. “Their bond grows stronger every day, and I hear funny noises coming their rooms.”

“I thought they were in a prison, not rooms,” said a gnome child.

“Be quiet,” said the king.

“But,” a tall gnome piped up, “You have no proof that they are doing something suspicious.”

“I hear noises, their motion sensors no longer work, and I am able to open their doors anytime I want to. Is that not enough?”

Nobody answered the king’s question, so Knuckles said, “And Kait, the human one, has a smile on her face every time I look at her. How could a prisoner be happy in Gnomania? It almost seems as if they are planning to...”

“ESCAPE!” exclaimed King King. “They wouldn’t dare!”

“They might,” said a gnome teen. “I sure want to escape. Especially with you being the king.”

The king’s face was quite calm, but he spoke with downright anger. “Never insult your king, Gretchen.”

Gretchen crossed his arms and rolled his eyes.

“Let’s get back on point here,” said Knuckles. “So they are probably going to escape. Tomorrow night would be the most likely. So we’ll have alarms set up all over the city. And soldiers hiding everywhere.”

King King smiled at Knuckles. “You always were my favorite citizen.”

“Thank, you sir.”

“Anyway, Knuckles’ idea was perfect. We *will* be prepared.”

I yawned and sat up. I had a very good sleep last night. I knew I’d have a better sleep tomorrow night though, because I’d be in my own bed, and wouldn’t even have to worry about the gnomes.

I imitated the noise the motion sensor used to make. Then Knuckles came to my door and served me my breakfast. I ate it quickly and exited the cage/jail cell.

I started working with a toaster. He was actually pretty nice; he just hated King King, too. So I made him better. Unfortunately, that took me all day.

At the end of the day, I walked into the cage/jail cell very happy.

“It was a good day today, wasn’t it?” asked Veronica.

“Oh, yes. And now we’re going to make it better.”

We waited until it was dark. Veronica said she’d go back to the world she was from, a world where all of the citizens were elves. I said I’d go back home. I would just tell my parents I had spent the night at a friend’s house for a long time. I knew they’d never believe me, but it was better than telling the truth.

Finally, it was time.

“Ready?” Veronica asked me.

“I’m more than ready.”

“Then let’s go.”

We quietly opened the doors, and scurried out. I was free!

“Which way is the exit?” I asked Veronica.

“That way,” she replied, pointing to a large set of stairs.

I nodded, and we crawled to the stairs. I stood up and got ready to sprint up the stairs.

Suddenly, someone jumped out of a dark corner and grabbed me. I screamed, and whoever it was gave me a slap on the back. "Help!" I paused. There was no reply, but there was a scream. "Veronica!"

Then King King dragged Veronica into a space where there was light. She was struggling to free herself from a gnome I had never seen before. Then the gnome wrapped her up in a cloth. She was only able to move her feet and head.

I looked at who was holding me captive. It was Knuckles! I could never get away from him. He was much too strong. Well, I could at least try.

I wiggled, but that was all I seemed to be doing. Knuckles was holding me tight.

"Try," said Knuckles, "but you can never get away from a gnome."

I knew I couldn't get away, so I just gave up. Knuckles took a step forward. But as he did, Veronica tripped him. Knuckles fell flat on his face, and he let me go.

"Run! Run, Kait, run! Don't worry about me, worry about yourself! Run!" Veronica shouted.

I took her advice and ran. I ran up the stairs and I was back where I was when Knuckles dragged me down before. Except, it was day. I decided to ignore it, and picked up my backpack that I left on the grass. Then I ran back to my house.

"How was school, honey?" my mom asked.

"School?" I asked. I was really confused. It had been a long time since I was at home. I thought about it for a while, and then I figured it out. A week plus a few more days in Gnomania was equal to a couple hours on Earth. "School was fine," I said.

I was halfway up the stairs when I felt something coming up my throat. It felt terrible! It was like a centipede crawling up from my stomach, through my throat, and into my mouth. Suddenly, I realized what was happening. I had escaped, so the gnomes were forcing me to tell my parents about my talent. WORDS were filling up my mouth, and they now needed to come out. I was forced to tell my mom, "I have a talent. I can talk to mechanical items..."

Before I knew it, the story was pouring out of my mouth. I couldn't control it. Fortunately, I didn't tell them about Gnomania. Only my talent.

When I was done, I stopped. I was expecting the worst.

"Oh, that's nice. That could really help around the house," said my dad.

"You're not going to send me to a wizard school? Or have Grandma Marion come over?"

"No," the two of them said together.

I smiled, and climbed up the stairs. I was thinking about Veronica, but I was sure she would be fine.

"Why is there dirt all over your hair?" asked Alarm when I entered my room.

"It's a long story," I told him. "A long story."

Epilogue

Two months later, Gnomania had a new king. Or actually, a new queen. Her name was Queen Veronica, and she ruled the city fairly and kindly.

Once I left Gnomania, Veronica convinced all of the gnomes, even Knuckles, to turn against evil King King. She said they needed to stop being afraid of him, and stand up for themselves. So they did, and all of the gnomes removed him from his throne.

Since King King is now gone, the mechanical items are all better! So now Gnomania lives in happiness, and Veronica e-mails me every week.

I'm happy now, too. My parents got used to me talking to mechanical items all of the time, and they're okay with me receiving letters from an elf every week.