Boot nicked

Next night find them meeting in Betula’s alley at midnight. Sully exhausted from cleaning out the vegetable garden. Both Ambril and Sully were grounded for being out late the night before. They speculate on whether they’ll be let out for high school graduation or not.

Ygg and the gnomes show up with bundles of ropes and pulleys. Sully pulls out a series of bronze baby shoes she’s strung together with wire---kind of a wind chime---to replace the boot with geraniums. They don’t want Mrs. Flood to feel like she’s been taken advantage of.

The gnomes get busy with their ropes and winches but can’t get the boot off. Sully offers up a new remedy she’s made---disappearing spray. It makes anything disappear---temporarily. Spray it on one of the links on the chain. They do and the boot falls to the ground smashing the gernanium noisily and frightening Bummil so badly he accidentally sprays Baldot’s head which promptly disappears. Junkson, Flood’s next door neighbor lives above his shop and races out with a shotgun, spewing threats to thieves and beggars. Ambril manages to grab the big boot and shove it out of sight. What he finds is the headless Baldot walking calmly down the street. He watches a moment in disbelief then grabs him and carries him inside his shop.

Outside the kids peer in the window watching as Baldot’s head reforms just as the old man fumbles for a light switch. The old man is flummoxed by the sight of Baldot’s head. Talks to his dog Lullabelle decides to lock up Baldot in a glass cupboard and get some sleep.

He goes off to bed. Sully and Ambril are concerned they’ll not be able to free Baldot but Ygg snickers, the Gnomes can through any lock. As he speaks they hear the click of the door, and it whispers open, they creep inside and watch as Bummil easily frees Baldot and turn to leave when Sully spies in the cupboard. It’s Mrs. Flood’s old ornament. It’s been broken in a couple of places. Sully gathers all the pieces together and replaces them with her old bronze baby shoe.

Not stealing if you leave something in exchange.

Don’t know if Junkson will see it that way---but.

They leave, Sully fixes shoe---Ygg shines it up a little and looks hard at the ornamental buckle. He says it reminds him of something but he can’t think what.

Quietly, the gnomes reattach the ladies shoe. Ygg and the gnomes take the boot with them to clean up and find a safe place to keep it.

At Betula’s shop a few days later they watch as Mrs. Flood beams up at her ladies shoe as others admire it. Both Sully and Ambril were able to sneak back into their houses without detection. Ygg says the gnomes shined up the shoe---it looks better than new now. They speculate that a saucer moon means a full moon but just in case the gnomes have taken it upon themselves to keep watch for the Giant.

“Ouch! That’s my foot!” Sully whispered, “It’s the only part of me that doesn’t ache! I had to clean out the vegetable garden as part of my penal servitude for being so late last night. I’m grounded until at least Friday.”

“I guess I got off easy this time, I’m grounded too but I didn’t have to clean anything.” Ambril whispered back.The two were huddled together in the side alley by Betula’s waiting for Ygg to arrive. It was just past midnight on the night following the Giant’s appearance.

Sully pointed at a large dark object swinging in the breeze below the Shoe sign. “Is that it? It looks more like a flowerpot than a boot---are you sure about this?”

“I went by this morning to check, I couldn’t tell if it matches exactly, there were a lot of flowers in the way but I think it’s about the right size---BIG.”

“Bigger than two of me!” said a voice at Ambril’s knee.

Ambril jumped. “Bummil! Where’s Ygg?”

“Ygg wants you doolallies to join him across the street, Baldot’s run into a snag.”

Ambril squinted up at the big boot and realized that it wasn’t a breeze that was blowing it around, the boot had several gnomes attached to ropes swinging around it. Sully and Ambril snuck across the street and found Ygg lounging in the Shoe store’s doorway. “What took you?” He asked

“How long have you been here?”

He grinned, “Nought long really, these guys are fast!”

Suddenly Baldot hovered an inch from Ambril’s nose. “We be having a problem getting the boot unhitched. It be chained up but good!”

Ambril remembered the blow torch she’d seen in operation the first day she’d arrived.

“We can saw through it but it’ll take a while.” Baldot continued. “And it be noisy,” He jerked his chin toward the junk shop next door. “I know from experience that Junkson there’s a light sleeper.”

Ygg and Ambril looked at each other. “You got any ideas?” Ambril asked him then noticed that Sully was rummaging around in her back pack. She popped up looking triumphant with what looked like a bottle of perfume in her hand.

“This might work! I just whipped this up a couple of days ago and haven’t had a chance to try it out.”

“Making the boot smell nice won’t be helping…though a few of the gnomes could use something, any of you been hanging out with farm animals?” Ygg nodded as several of the gnomes nodded their heads.

Sully looked slightly injured, “No, this is a new remedy---it’s disappearing spritzer.”

Ambril, Ygg and the gnomes just stared at her.

“Just how be that helping us? Making the boot invisible nought solve our problem!” complained Baldot he had begun to clean his fingernails as he swayed gently in the breeze.

Sully scoffed at him, “No, no---you make a link in the chain disappear---just long enough to pull the chain apart…you see?”

Ambril and Ygg still looked mystified but Sully shrugged and handed the spritzer to Bummil. “Just try it, spray one of the links on the chain and watch what happens.”

Bummil sniffed the spritzer dubiously. I nought be smelling too---frilly afterward?“

“It has no smell at all---trust me!” Sully pleaded and pointed encouragingly up at the boot.

Baldot nodded to the gnomes manning the pulleys and ropes and both Bummil and Baldot swung up to the boot. A moment later there was a surprised gasp then they had to run for cover as the boot came crashing down, nearly on their heads. It landed with a monumental crash on the sidewalk, the geranium pot cracked, dirt and flowers littered the sidewalk.

The gnomes were down in a half second scrambling out of their ropes and tugging down the pulleys. Ambril and Ygg dragged the boot into the shadows. Everyone held their breath---then held it a little longer. Ambril let hers out in a soft rush of relief and smiled up at Ygg.

Sully bent down to talk to Bummil and Baldot who were just stepping out from the shadows. “It worked a treat! We could be using this with the carnivorous plants---“

But their relief was shortlived from next door issued a wild haired skinny legged apparition. It was Junkson looking wild eyed and angry. “Thieves! Beggars! Lottery winners! I heard you! You keep away from my valuable goods, you hear me?” He banged his ancient shotgun on the ground which frightened Bummil so much he accidentally spritzed Baldot’s head with the disappearing remedy.

Baldot had been in the act of stepping out onto the sidewalk as he was spritzed. Now headless, his body continued the action. He emerged from the shadows and began walking toward Junkson. Before anyone could grab him and drag him into the shadows Junkson spied him. His eyes went round with shock and raised his gun as the headless gnome marched toward him. Ambril braced herself for the gunshot---but none came. It seemed that Junkson’s greed had wrestled control from his anger and fear.

He lowered his shot gun and gawked at the ceramic apparition as Baldot marched by him. He scratched his head, looked down the sidewalk one way then the other then scooped up the marching gnome and disappeared into his shop. Ambril could hear a series of clicks, slides and thuds as Junkson fussed with the locks on the door.

“Oh no, Baldot! What are we going to do?” Sully whispered.

I be nought worried about Baldot as much as I am about Junkson. We don’t want him having a heart attack or calling the police or anything. Baldot can take care of himself, once he is himself, of course.” Ygg whispered then beckoned to Ambril and Sully to follow him as he slunk over to the Junk Shop’s dirty windows and peered inside.

Inside Ambril saw the glow of a desk light switch on and the gloating face of Junkson as he set Baldot on his back and watched the gnome’s body continue to walk. Then he chuckled to himself.

“The stuff should be wearing off about now.” Sully whispered.

Sure enough, Ambril could see the outline of Baldot’s head begin to glow. They lucked out as just as Junkson became preoccupied with switching on another light just as Baldot came to his senses and froze.

Junkson’s face went from gleeful greed to shocked disappointment when he turned around and found an ordinary ceramic gnome lying on his desk. He spent the next fifteen minutes feeling around for a switch, trying to wrench Baldot’s head off then cussing softly under his breath. Finally he sighed, opened a large wooden cupboard behind the counter and locked Baldot inside. Still mumbling foul things to the universe he turned off the lights and limping up the stairs slammed the door to his apartment. The silence settled down around them comfortingly.

“Now what?” whispered Sully, “He’s locked in a cupboard inside a locked store.”

Ygg just chuckled, “No worries, just watch.”

As if on cue the door to the junk shop jiggled and clicked and thunked several times before whispering open. Ambril, Sully and Ygg slid inside the door. Ambril wondered if there was anything scarier than a junk shop after midnight. The piles of junk and weirdly shaped stacks took on monstrous identities. Ambril could have sworn she saw the coat rack lean toward them. Ambril and Ygg followed Sully who had made her way behind the counter and was trying the lock when it miraculously slid open of its own accord and Baldot jumped into her arms and winked, “Miss me?” he whispered and displayed all of his chipped teeth.

Sully blanched and set him down. He had a bag slung over his back which clinked slightly when he moved across the floor and out the front door. The other’s followed and waited while Bummil mysteriously relocked the front door from the outside.

Nothing was safe from these guys, Ambril thought. No one said a thing until they were safely across the street in Betula’s side alley. A couple of the gnomes met them with the very dirty black boot. Baldot had unslung the bag from his shoulder.

“That went well! Sully grinned, “at least no one died or lost a limb.”

“Excepting Baldot who did lose his head---but only temporarily,” put in Bummil.

“Do you happen to have any fixit juice on you?” Baldot asked Ygg.

“Why which one of you lost a limb?” Sully looked around askance.

Ygg had already pulled out a vial of liquid and held it out. “Who is it now?” He asked.

Baldot grabbed the vial from him. “It nought be for one of us you Ninnies, it be for this fine thing!” Baldot pulled a very ornate Giant ladies shoe from the bag. The heel had broken off and the buckle had snapped lose but otherwise it was intact.

“Hey! That’s Mrs. Flood’s shoe! Where’d you find it?” Sully gasped.

Baldot frowned at her. “It nought be Mrs. Flood’s no more, I nearly sat on it in the cupboard. I’m taking it as compensation for the humiliation I went through at the hands of that nasty, snot nosed old codger. He nearly broke off me neck three times!”

“Look, that belongs to Mrs. Flood. It was stolen from her last fall! We have to give it back to her!”

“I wonder what Junkson wants with this old shoe? He must have wanted it bad to steal it from his neighbor of forty years.” Mused Ygg as he picked up the shoe and held it up to the light.

Baldot wasn’t ready to give up his prize. “I found it fair and square---if’n she misplaced it earlier---that’s nought to do with me.” He groused.

Ambril nudged her friend, “offer him your baby shoe,” she hissed.

Sully rolled her eyes, “Like that’s going to work,” she sighed but then pulled out her bronze baby shoe and held it up to the light.

“Would you take this in exchange? It’s real bronze and---” But Ambril didn’t need to go any further.

Baldot’s mouth had dropped open as he stared at the baby shoe in open admiration. “It reminds me of me Mamie! She wore shoes just like that ‘un!” He reached up and grabbed the shoe and held it to his chest.

“So---there are girl gnomes? I didn’t know…” Sully said.

Bummil sighed, “It’s a long sad story with lots of arguing in it…after which they all ran off never to be seen again.”

“So you’ll take that in exchange then?” Asked Ambril once again.

Baldot nodded still smiling beautifically and hugging the bronze shoe.

Ygg had already taken the shoe and was just completing the repairs. He stood looking at the ornate black buckle closely. “This emblem here, this be so familiar but I can’t seem to place it.”

“Watch out Ygg, remember what happened when we repaired the jug!” Sully whispered tensely.

But it was too late, before Ygg had a chance to clamp both hands onto the it wriggled and jumped right out of his hand and onto the sidewalk where it hopped into the shadows. Ambril then heard munching sounds.

“It seems to like geraniums,” mused Bummil, “That be all right, I do too.”

“Great! Now how do we get a living shoe up on Mrs. Flood’s sign?” Sully asked.

Bummil squared his shoulders. “All objects just want to be useful is all, let me talk to it a bit.” He marched over to where the sounds of munching were loudest. “Hey! Would you be interested in an important job?”

The munching continued unabated.

“It be a job requiring lots of high level observation---only the keenest eye-lets will do for this job.”

They still heard only munching.

“And it be one only given to lovely, beautifical shoes such as yourself.” Bummil continued.

The munching suddenly stopped. Out from the shadows emerged the shoe with bits of geranium still stuck in its stiching.

Bummil crouched down to it. “Now this be a secretive sort of job, with lots and lots of observation required…are you---up to it?”

The shoe wrinkled it’s toes as if in thought then slowly bent it’s middle in ascent.

Bummil nodded then carefully lifted the shoe and marched back across the street. In a twinkling he was airborne along with several other gnomes. They soon had the shoe attached.

Sully yawned as they watched the shoe wriggle a little as it swung gently back and forth, testing its supports.

Ygg yawned too as he picked up the big black boot and dusted it off. “I’ll be taking this back home with me to clean it up.” He squinted up at the moon. “I’m guessing the moon will be saucer full by Saturday.

“Good! I’ll be free to get grounded again.” Sully put in as she pulled her bike out of the rack.

Ambril waved goodbye as she too jumped on her bike and pedaled home. Her mind ran over the evening’s events and kept going back to the shoe—specifically the ornate shoe buckle. She had recognized it too---the emblem matched exactly the one found on her Medallion.