

Thalia looked out the car window at Lily Manor as she and her dad slowly approached it. The place resembled a castle out of a fairy tale with its twisting towers and numerous balconies. She couldn't believe she was spending her summer out here in the countryside of England in a house so big she could get lost in it. She desperately missed the apartment she shared with her dad in the city.

"Would you look at that!" her dad exclaimed as he drove the car up the long paved driveway lined with blooming lilies. "The pictures really don't do it justice!"

"Is this where the Queen of England stays on her holidays?" Thalia muttered under her breath.

Her dad heard her saucy comment and winked back at her.

"I don't think so, dear. I know it may seem odd that I picked such a huge old mansion for our summer home, but it was pretty cheap considering it came with a full-time staff and other perks. It has a swimming pool and one of the most beautiful gardens around. It will be great for hosting my business meetings," her father said as if trying to win over a customer.

Thalia looked on glumly. The car came to a halt in front of the main entrance and Thalia stepped out of the car with her dad. They were met by a group of people who introduced themselves as the house staff. While the staff went through the boring introductions of each person Thalia glanced up at the huge building in front of her. She noticed a silhouette behind a curtain of a window as if someone were watching them.

*That's odd, Thalia thought. I thought the butler said all the staff was present and no one was in the house at the moment.* She eventually forgot about the stranger behind the curtain while they were being given the tour of Lily Manor. Every surface of the house was polished to perfection. There were many vast rooms and ornate pillars rose up to the ceiling. The house consisted of four floors but the living quarters were only on the first two. They were told nothing was on the other two except things in storage. After the tour one of the maids led Thalia to her room.

"Paul will bring up your luggage from the car," she said unsmiling, "If you need anything just ring that bell."

She pointed in the vague direction of the bell and hurried on her way. Thalia was left

alone with only herself and her thoughts. The room seemed to swallow her up. The room had old intricate tapestries hanging from the wall. There was a mahogany desk by a large glass window and a king-size four-poster bed in the middle of it all. The bathroom was the size of her room in the apartment, was all marble, and had a whirlpool bath. There was even a balcony outside her room and it overlooked the garden. All these luxuries were great but Thalia still missed the familiarities of home. She didn't know how a thirteen-year-old girl like herself was going to survive in this lonely dreary place. A light knock on the door interrupted Thalia's thoughts and she sprang up to answer it. Paul, a quiet serving boy, stood awkwardly outside her door holding her luggage.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Oh, of course," Thalia replied. She watched as the boy set down her luggage by her massive wardrobe.

"Thank you very much, Paul," she said as she went over to her belongings. She suddenly came to a halt and realized that something important was missing.

"Did you happen to see a guitar case in our luggage?" she asked sharply without meaning to.

"Uh... no, miss," he stammered. "Was I supposed to?"

"I must have forgotten it," she mumbled to herself. This made matters even worse. Playing guitar would have given her something to do but now she didn't even have that.

"You're free to go. I'll be fine," she said nodding at the boy. He left in a whirl. Thalia decided to take a quick nap before supper to hopefully put herself in a better mood. She threw herself on top of the covers of her bed and fell asleep in an instant.

She awoke to sunlight streaming through the huge glass panel windows of her room and the sound of twittering birds. She realized her intended catnap had turned into a nightlong rest. She noticed a package lying on the table along with two notes. One of them was from her dad telling her she had missed supper and that breakfast was at 9:00. The second had the single word "Enjoy" scrawled onto it and was taped to the package. Thalia cautiously opened the package and inside was a guitar, a stack of guitar music, and a few books. Who had given her this package? Was it Paul? For some reason Thalia didn't think that was possible. Whoever it was, Thalia was extremely grateful.

She glanced at a clock on the wall and with dismay saw it was ten to nine. She had ten minutes to freshen up. She took a short shower and hurriedly got dressed. She had picked out some khaki colored shorts, a blue T-shirt, and her Nikes. She never took her dad up on his offer to buy her designer clothes. She didn't see the point. She pulled her long curly black hair into a braid and rushed down to breakfast. Breakfast was a silent meal. Her dad tried to lighten the mood but nothing prevailed.

The rest of the day was a lonely one for Thalia. She played the guitar and read the books she had been given but still longed for some company. By 5:30 PM she was bored out of her mind. She was about to pick up the guitar again when she heard a noise from above her. It sounded as if some one was playing the piano. She had a room on the second floor so whoever was above her was on the third floor, which was strictly off limits. Thalia was instantly curious. Who was playing that piano? Then she remembered the mysterious shadow of a person behind a curtain. Was it the same person? Thalia didn't stop to think; she just followed the sound. Whoever was playing the piano was obviously a professional.

The sound oddly led her to a tapestry hanging on the wall. Thalia looked behind it and saw a door. Carefully she opened it and saw a dusty bare room with a spiral staircase in the middle. Thalia went up the stairs taking great care not to let the steps creak. Once she ascended to the top Thalia found herself in a cavernous room. It was lavishly furnished and had a grand piano in the center of the room. Thalia gasped. Sitting at the piano was a little red haired man dressed in green. He looked as if he had lost his way and stepped out of a storybook. The little man suddenly stopped playing the piano and turned around quickly. There was no place to hide so Thalia just stood there lamely while the little man looked at her in shock.

"How in the world did you get here?" he whispered in a high-pitched squeak.

"Who are you?" Thalia asked in wonder.

"Hey! I asked the question first," he snapped grumpily. "The answer to your question is that I'm a leprechaun. Any one can figure that out. Name's Richy. But you must answer mine. How did you get here!?"

"Well, I... uh came up the stairs," she replied wondering if she was dreaming.

"You found an entrance in your room?" he asked. Thalia nodded numbly.

“Are you enjoying the guitar?” he asked suddenly. The question came out of nowhere.

“Uh yes, it’s wonderful, but wait. You gave that to me?!” she said in astonishment.

“Oh, its nothing. I knew you forgot yours and thought I could spare one of mine and a few sheets of music. I love music,” his face became dreamy at the very word.

“OK, what about the books? Did you give those to me too?” she asked still a little shocked she was talking to a leprechaun.

“Oh, no. That was Louise,” he replied as if Thalia's notion was ridiculous. “She thought you could use some entertainment.”

“Who's Louise?” Thalia asked with a puzzled expression.

“Richy,” boomed a voice from the next room, “Who in the world are you talking to?! Is it your imaginary friend Jewels again?”

Thalia jumped in fright. A green scaly head popped in from next door and a massive scaly body followed it. An actual dragon lumbered into the room. She was perhaps the size of a Clydesdale horse, but a lot more terrifying. The eyes came to rest on Thalia. Thalia wondered if she was about going to become a Thalia shish kabob.

“Well, my oh my. What have we here? Is this the girl, Richy?” the dragon asked. Thalia calmed down a little bit. The dragon's voice was calming and full of sympathy.

“I believe so, Louise. This is the girl that moved in,” he replied completely at ease with the dragon. Louise clucked like a mother hen.

“My, sweetie, I'm so sorry. No mother to look after you it seems. And that heartless father of yours, dragging you out here to nothing-land. Would you like something to eat?”

The word rang a bell in Thalia's head and she realized she hadn't been keeping track of time. She glanced at her watch, which read five minutes to six.

“Uh, yeah, I mean it's five minutes till supper time and Dad doesn't like tardiness so I'd better hurry. Um, will you guys still be here?”

Wow, she was talking to mystical creatures and asking if they would still be here. Still, Thalia felt as if she had found some friends in these strange creatures.

“Of course we'll still be here. We're not going anywhere,” the leprechaun said.

Thalia waved good-bye and headed down the spiral staircase and back into her

room. She had a quiet supper with Dad until he cleared his throat after desert had been served.

“You know, Thalia. I've been thinking perhaps it was a little cruel of me to have you come here with me. You're away from the home and life you love so I was thinking of sending you back to the city,” he said in his all-business voice.

“No!” Thalia blurted without meaning to. Her dad looked surprised and Thalia was a little surprised at herself too. “I mean it's fine here, Dad. Lots of things to do,” she said smiling enthusiastically.

She just couldn't go back after what she had discovered.

“Well, uh, I guess that solves that,” her dad said still a little shocked at Thalia's outburst. “Are you feeling OK, dear? Are you really sure?” he asked nervously. “I mean at breakfast and lunch you looked --”

“Dad,” Thalia said with a sure smile, “I'm just fine. Good night.” She got up from her chair and went upstairs to her room.

She immediately went to the tapestry and pulled it back to reveal the door she had found previously. She climbed up the stairs into the massive room where Richy was passionately playing the violin.

“So, it wasn't a dream,” she whispered looking around. The leprechaun grouchily put down his violin.

“Of course it wasn't, silly. Louise is next door in her bedroom or should I say library. I was just in the middle of an important movement of the song when you so rudely interrupted me, so hurry along and next time don't just barge in.”

Thalia smiled at the leprechaun's rantings and went over to Louise's room. Richy was right. Louise's room did look more like a library than a bedroom. Shelves of books lined the walls. Richy's vast room seemed a mere closet compared to Louise's room. The dragon sat among it all reading a book.

“Well hello there, dear. How are you? I'm so glad you're not leaving. It'll be nice to have some one other than Richy to keep me company,” the dragon said.

“How did you know what Dad and I were talking about?” Thalia asked.

“I have good hearing, sweetie. How are you enjoying the books I picked out for you?”

"They're wonderful. Why do you have so many books?"

"Well every dragon hoards something; usually money. I prefer books. So much more worthwhile."

"Oh," Thalia said not sure what to say.

"Yes, and Richy uses all his money on music. It's one of his great passions. Do sit down, dear. Have a seat on one of those cushions.

"Is it just Richy and you, and does anyone know about you?" Suddenly Thalia was bursting with questions.

"Well there are pixies in the garden. I think there are a few gnomes as well. Of course I can't forget my cousin, Neil, who lives in the lake."

"Wait, who's your cousin, Neil?"

"Well, he's what you humans think is the Loch Ness monster," Richy interrupted as he bustled into the room with a cup of tea in his hand. Apparently he was done with his movement.

"He's quite friendly though. Wouldn't hurt a soul," Richy said and took a big gulp of tea. He then sat down on the cushions beside Thalia.

"So, no one really knows about all you guys?" Thalia asked.

"I'm afraid not, dear. It's probably better that way." the dragon said. Thalia nodded.

"Boy, oh boy, we need to plan our agenda for tomorrow. So many things to do," the leprechaun said as he bounced up from his cushion.

Thalia helped Richy with his "agenda". Planning must be one of his other great passions. On the list of things to do was, "Teach Thalia how to steal a pot of gold."

Thalia couldn't wait for that lesson. After saying goodnight to the odd pair Thalia went down to her own bedroom and got ready for bed. As she crawled under the covers, Thalia thought of the exciting summer lying ahead of her. Perhaps she could ask her dad to make coming here a summer tradition. Summers at Lily Manor. What could be better?