

Skitter

Echoes, distant. Were they distant? She didn't know.

Her head was pounding, the back of it warm and sticky. *Did I hit my head?* Everything felt hazy, like a head cold. Stiff and sore, she felt the rest of her body, checking for injuries. *Shoulders feel OK. Arms, check. Stomach also OK. Hips really sore. How long have I been sitting here?* Her hands worked down her thighs, then to her lower legs. On her right leg was a huge bump. It hurts to the touch. *Definitely fractured.* Moving to her left leg she was not ready for what she felt. Sharp and jagged. She gasped sharply, pain shot to her brain, exacerbating her headache.

Getting her breathing under control, she looked around. It was pitch black, the only light coming from directly above her. A human sized hole came into focus. *I fell?* She could see blades of grass lining the edge, blowing in the wind. Sky blue above that. A quick sound pulled her focus into the darkness. She turned her head quickly; too quickly. The pain followed her movement and slammed into her hard. A light flashed from behind her eyes. The sound no longer mattered in comparison to how much her head hurt.

It was probably my imagination, anyway. She closed her eyes, took a few deep breaths, and got herself under control. Then the sound again. Small and quick, barely there. *OK, not my imagination!* The skittering sound happened more often. Always quick, and maybe more than one (thing?) was making the sound? It seemed to be surrounding her.

“Crap, crap, crap!” she said, realizing the only light coming into the concrete horror show was shining directly over her.

Though the pain was horrendous, she tried to scoot her body into the dark. The sound seemed to multiply. *Were there more things? Or was that just the echo?* Her mind raced; the sound felt oppressive. Closing in on her, claustrophobia caused a panic attack. She put her hands over her ears, eyes closed tight. With the sound magnified by the knowledge that she was stuck, incapacitated, and light headed from panicked breathing, the only thing she could think to do while awaiting her fate was to scream.

“Hey, are you OK?” a squeaky voice asked. The skitter stopped. Kara's eyes were shut so tightly she thought they fused closed. “Hey, why you screamin?”

The girl slowly opened her eyes and found she was no longer in pure blackness. All around her shone tiny lights, miniature lanterns. Hundreds of them.

“You're hurt,” the voice observed.

“Yeah, I fell. Where am I?”

“You are in our home. This is the Great Hall. My name is Ovscar! And you are...?”

Her eyes adjusted to the light and focused on small, chubby, human-like creatures, all of which were wearing pointy hats and what seemed like tool belts.

“I’m Kara,” she replied.

“KARA!” Ovscar shouted. All his companions yelled the name back, then cheered. Kara’s confusion didn’t seem to register with the little skitterers.

“Our new friend Kara is hurt! She will not fit through our tunnels. Wrap her wounds, start building a sling, and we will get her out the way she came!” Ovscar completed his decree with the clap of his hands and everyone took their stations.

Her broken legs were cleaned. The pain was biting, but Kara was thankful. The little creatures mashed together a poultice that numbed the discomfort.

Time went quickly in the Great Hall. Before she knew it, Kara was being ushered onto a sling and hoisted into the air! Lines of skitterers pulled and heaved through a pulley system, and Kara got closer to the hole.

Her hands could reach the edge. Her head popped out and the smell of grass filled her nose! Kara pulled herself up and out, just as though she were exiting a pool. Birthed back to the world. The paste numbing her legs was holding up.

Kara began pulling herself down a path, where she was greeted with police lights and barking dogs, all searching for her.

“Here! I’m here!” Kara cried out. The last thing she remembered was the doors closing on the ambulance.

After a long stay in the hospital, and with a long road to recovery laid out in front of her, Kara was healing. She ventured back out to where she had fallen into the earth. Kara wasn’t sure if she hallucinated the whole thing or if there actually were small, gnome-like beings underground. The hole was gone and Kara left a small basket of fruit, some matches, and cloth on the ground.

When she came back the next day, the basket was there, but empty! There was a tiny lantern left inside. Kara confirmed that they were, in fact, real! Every week from then on, she left a basket of goodies for her tiny saviors.



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