

Journey
TO
Imagiland



tom tullgren

Journey to Imagiland

Tom Tullgren

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Chapter One

The Inheritance

Kristen and Lona were sitting on the porch step at Kristen's house. It was a cold October day and the girls had been playing all morning. The cold air was nipping at their ears, nose, and face — one of those days when it's best to keep moving.

"What do you want to do now, Kristen?" asked Lona. "I'm getting cold and hungry sitting here."

Lona was a thin petite girl, a couple of years younger than Kristen. She often complained about being hungry, but when she ate — she ate like a bird. She and Kristen have been friends for a long time. She looked up to Kristen, and treated her like a big sister.

Kristen was tapping her foot on the step as if she was keeping rhythm to a tune in her head. Her face was cradled in her hands, with her elbows resting on her knees. She will be

ten years old — next month. She is a head taller than Lona and has a more athletic build

Suddenly her face lit up. “I know what we can do — she was interrupted by the mail truck arriving — we can go and get the mail,” she added with a chuckle.

They jumped from their perch on the steps and ran down the walkway.

“Hi Mr. Postman,” Kristen called.

The postman was checking mail destined for her address. He replied with an automatic “Hello,” but when he looked up and saw Kristen and Lona, he gave a more enthusiastic response. “Hi girls ... kind of chilly today, huh?”

“Yah — we’ve been playing all morning, but now we’re going inside to warm up and get some lunch,” Kristen replied.

“Well ... it looks like someone got a package ... Kristen ...”

“That’s me! — a package for me?”

“Uh-huh ... the rest of the mail is for your folks.” He handed it all to Kristen and added, “have a nice day, girls.”

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“Thank you ... see ya,” Kristen replied.

The girls walked slowly towards the house — Kristen was scanning the package to see whom it was from.

“Oh — it’s from my uncle — he’s a Captain of a ship — he travels all around the world.” She looked at Lona, who was watching her only half interested.

“Once he sent me a natural pearl necklace. My mom says they are very rare, and she’s keeping it in her jewelry box until I’m older. She wears it on special occasions when she goes out with my dad — but I don’t mind — I wonder what’s in this package?”

“Maybe ... it’s like something good to eat,” Lona said, rubbing her tummy.

Kristen laughed. “No, I’m sure my mom’s making that in the kitchen.”

When they entered the house, the aroma of fresh baked cookies attacked their nostrils.

“Mmm — I smell what you mean,” Lona quipped.

“Mom, we’ve got the mail ... I’ve got a package from Uncle Noah.”

“I have one more batch of cookies to bake and then I’ll make lunch,” her mother replied, “What did your uncle send you this time?”

Kristen shook the package to get a hint. “I don’t know, but it’s kind of heavy. Mmm — can we have a cookie?”

Her mother put the last batch of cookies in the oven and said, “Just one ... I don’t want you to spoil your appetite.”

The girls snatched a cookie each and began devouring them. Kristen tore open the paper wrapper, and opened the box inside. “It’s a book!” she exclaimed.”

The book cover was white and well worn. The title was in the center in small letters.

“deja-vu,” Kristen read aloud.

“It must be a novel,” her mother guessed, “I think it means something like ... well ... it’s like when you visit a place the first time ... you get a feeling like you’ve been there before ... something like that.”

Kristen opened the cover and found a letter inside. She handed the book to her mother and began to read the letter out loud.

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Dear Kristen,

How is my favorite niece? Good I hope. Today I send you a book. It has a funny French title, but it is written in English. The author is unknown.

A long time ago, I helped an old sea dog get back to America — he lost his ship in a storm off the Cape of Good Hope. He managed to save the ship's log and the book you now hold in your hands. While aboard my ship, he kept the book with him all the time, carrying it in a handbill bag.

Many nights I would see him reading it before he went to sleep. I was curious as to why he guarded it so. If anyone asked him about it, he'd shrug his shoulders and say, "It's just a book." If pressed further, he'd change the subject. He was good at that. One night, while he was sleeping, I tried to take it from him, but his hands were locked onto it — so I left him and it, sleeping.

Last month a port courier brought me a package with this note attached.

Dear Captain,

You did me a great honor once. When I lost my ship and had not a penny to my name, you gave me passage when no one else would.

TOM TULLGREN

When I got stateside, I fell on hard times. The Tramp Steamer Company I worked for would have nothing to do with me. No one would hire a Captain who lost his ship.

I took to the bottle to drown my sorrow, and boozed my health away. The doc says my liver is gone and soon, so will I.

I always wanted to re-pay you for the kindness you showed me, but I barely survived beyond bed and board. The book is my sole possession of any value. It has been handed down in my family from generation to generation. Since I have no heirs, I have racked my pickled brain trying to decide what to do with it. I thought of burning it, and taking it to Davy Jones's locker with me, but the book is so unique, I have decided to leave it in your hands.

You will discover, this is no ordinary book. You will find as you read any story in it, that you will actually become the protagonist. And, when the story concludes, you will have no recollection of it! However, from that time on people you meet for the first time will seem familiar to you. When you visit a place for the very first time, you will feel like you've been there before. *Deja-vu*.

From an old Salt, "May the winds treat you kindly, and may you always sail on storm-less seas."

Captain, Jeremy Baha

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I think Captain Baha was under the influence of alcohol when he wrote me the letter. I have glanced at the titles of the stories in the book, but I have little time for reading.

I remember your father telling me how much pleasure he got reading stories to you, when you were little. Often you and he would enjoy reading the same story over and over again.

Now that you are old enough to read yourself, perhaps you will enjoy reading the stories in this book. I hope Captain Baha will rest easy, knowing that his book is in good hands.

My love to your family, and oceans of love to you.

Uncle Noah.

“Yes, I think your uncle is right,” Kristen’s mom said, “the old sea Captain must have been drunk when he wrote that note. Protagonists are the main characters in a story ... you can’t become a protagonist unless you are in the story! There must be a dozen short stories here — why don’t you girls go to your room Kristen and read one while I get lunch on.”

“Okay mom ... can we have another cookie?”

“No — you’ll spoil your appetite.”

“Just one more, mom — they are so delicious,” Kristen begged.

Her mother gave her a stern look.

Lona was hoping for another cookie too, but she knew better than to ask.

Kristen gathered her letter and book and said, “Come-on Lona — let’s go read a story — and starve in my room.”

Kristen’s mother smiled and shook her head as she watched the girls slouching off down the hallway to Kristen’s room.

Chapter Two

The Journey Begins

The girls settled on Kristen's bed.

"What story do you want to read?" Kristen asked, browsing at the table of contents.

"I don't care — the first one, I guess," Lona replied.

"That's ... Journey to Imagiland."

"Where the heck is that?" Lona asked.

"Don't know — let's find out," Kristen replied as she flipped to the pages of the first story and read aloud.

Introduction

You are about to journey to an amazing place called Imagiland. The sun is rising — a giant orb — a ball of fire — quickly erasing a cold October night.

Its powerful heat waves warm your soul from millions of miles away — its dazzling light grows brighter and brighter...

Suddenly the words Kristen was reading blurred and pages of the book began to glow with a soft, gentle light. It felt warm on their faces, like summer sunshine. The light grew brighter and brighter — then it began to swirl around and around, like a carousel.

“Kristen!” Lona shouted, “What is happening? — I’m getting dizzy.”

Kristen clung to the book. It felt like it was glued to her hands. She could feel herself going around and around. The dazzling light pulled on her like a powerful magnet. She was being drawn into it, like falling into a giant funnel.

Lona, clinging to Kristen, was pulled in too — down, down, into the pages of the book — swirling helplessly, deeper and deeper. At the end of the funnel, the dazzling light stopped, and the girls were ejected onto a dirt road in a strange place. They were dressed in Halloween costumes. Each had a bag for treats in one hand and a flashlight in the other.

Kristen found it difficult to see through the eyeholes of her costume. She pulled on the hood to see better and caught

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sight of a strange looking bird standing in front of her. It was moving its head around and then she heard Lona's voice.

"Oh — I can't see ..."

"Lona — is that you?"

Lona dropped her goodie bag and adjusted her hood to see better. There was a ghost standing in front of her.

"Whoa!" she exclaimed, taking a step backward.

"What's the matter?" Kristen asked in a muffled voice.

Lona was confused. "Kristen?" she called.

Kristen was holding her hand over her mouth. It helped keep her costume eyeholes in a position so she could see clearly. Lona was dressed in a yellow-feathered costume with a long beak.

"What?" Kristen asked, and then she started laughing.

"What's so funny?" Lona asked.

"You look like a big canary — it's a pretty neat costume."

"What is this?" Lona asked taking hold of her beak.

"That's your big beak," Kristen chuckled.

“I can just see the tip of it,” said Lona. She pulled on it and her hood moved. She grabbed the hood and pulled it off of her head.

“Now I can see very clearly. When I first saw you, I jumped.”

“Why?” asked Kristen.

“Your costume,” Lona replied.

“I feel like I’m wearing a tent — all I can see besides you, is this stupid bag and a flashlight I dropped in it,” Kristen said, holding them up.

“Well, I’ll give you a hint,” said Lona, “what’s spooky and white all over?”

Kristen was puzzled, but only for a second. “Oh — whoo — I’m a ghost.”

Kristen began waving her arms. “Let’s fly away.”

Lona began to mimic Kristen. When she stretched out her arms, they looked like wings. She danced around flapping her wings, and calling, “Let’s fly home.”

“That is a neat costume, Lona.”

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Lona kept moving around in half circles, as if she was actually flying. Then she noticed Kristen had become very quiet.

“What’s the matter?”

“Where did we get these costumes — I don’t remember going to the mall — and how did we get here? My mother would never just drop us off on a strange road without giving us specific directions.”

“Maybe she’s up ahead waiting for us,” Lona volunteered.

“Yes, but which way is ahead?” Kristen asked, “In both directions, all I see is the road, trees, and sky. There are no houses.”

“Weird — what do you want to do?” Lona asked.

“Eenie, meany, miney, moe, — which direction should we go?” Kristen uttered.

The girls were silent. They each turned slowly around searching and listening for some sign of civilization. A huge black crow zooming above them pierced the silence. His loud cawing, startling them.

“Yikes!” cried Kristen, “that thing scarred the daylight out of me.”

Excited, Lona added, “Me too — I didn’t even see it — I hate crows — they are noisy, pesky, yucky, yucky, birds.”

As they watched the crow fly away, the girls regained their composure.

“Well,” said Kristen pointing, “let’s walk this way. When we get to a house, we’ll ask to use their phone to call my mom.”

"Okay," replied Lona.

They set out at a brisk pace. The gravel made a crunching sound beneath their feet and the sun felt warm on their backs. Occasionally they heard a bird calling from the trees.

“What time is it?” asked Lona. “I’m getting hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” replied Kristen, “I could go for a drink — hey...”

“What?” Lona asked.

“There’s a house!” replied Kristen excitedly. “Now maybe we can find out where we are and call my mom.”

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The girls raced off as fast as they could run. Dirt flew from their heels and the goodie bags fluttered in their hands. Lona's mask, which she had put back on, kept flopping down over her eyes. She kept reaching up to adjust it, while trying to maintain her stride.

Just before the house, there was an old wooden bridge. A trickle of water flowed beneath and the girls stopped before crossing it, to catch their breath.

“I hope someone is home in that house — it’s the only one that I can see,” said Kristen.

Lona was breathing heavy. “Phew — now I’m ... thirsty ... and hungry,” she replied.

“Come-on,” let’s walk across the bridge — we’ll take our time,” said Kristen.

As they started walking slowly across the bridge, a strange event happened. With each step, the sun slipped lower and lower in the sky and it grew darker and darker. By the time the girls got halfway across, it was almost night time.

Lona was still out of breath. "What is going on? — why is it getting so dark?"

"Stop!" Kristen yelled.

Lona froze.

Kristen looked back to see if it was getting dark behind them. Satisfied that it was, she said, "It's getting dark awfully fast."

"I know," said Lona, "It's weird."

After a brief pause, Kristen said, "Well, we might as well keep going — it's just as dark behind as it is ahead."

When they got to the end of the bridge, the sun was totally gone — replaced by a pale moon. They heard crickets singing and frogs croaking.

Lona fumbled with her flashlight and turned it on. She flashed the light in Kristen's masked face."

"Turn that thing off — you're blinding me."

Lona turned the light towards the house, and lit up a white picket fence. The girls made their way slowly towards it, with the annoying crunch, crunch, of the gravel beneath their feet. They stopped at the gate.

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“There’s a light on at the house,” Lona remarked.

“I see it,” Kristen replied.

The moon hanging just over the roof cast alternate light and dark eerie shadows around the house. Kristen reached to open the gate, but a faint sound of music caught her ear.

“You hear that?” she asked

“Yah,” Lona replied.

The girls kept silent listening, as the music grew louder and louder. It was a strange Halloween song ...

Look out for the Witcheepoo,
She may be after you,
You can hear her scream,
on Halloween,
So, watch out for the Witcheepoo!

She wears an old black hat,
And carries a cat on her back,
They say she's mean, on Halloween,
So, watch out for the Witcheepoo!

TOM TULLGREN

She swoops around the moon,
Riding on her broom,
You're out of luck,
If she sweeps you up,
So, watch out for the Witcheepoo!

“I think we should skip this place,” Lona said in a low voice, as the music stopped.

“Well, I don’t see any other lights up or down the road,” said Kristen.

She bravely swung the gate door open. It made a creaking sound that echoed into the night air.

"I'm scared," Lona whispered.

Kristen was frightened too, but she bravely said, “Look — we’ll leave the gate open and knock on the door. If we don’t like what we see — we’ll run like a bolt of lightning.”

They walked slowly along a narrow walkway leading to three wide steps. They paused on the top step. The music had stopped, and they strained their ears for sounds coming from

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inside the house. All was quiet — very, very, quiet. Kristen could feel her heart beating rapidly.

Suddenly the inside door swung open. The girls quickly retreated to the safety of the walkway.

"It's a witch! — let's get out of here," cried Lona.

For some strange reason, Kristen was frozen to the walkway.

Lona took hold of Kristen's costume and pulled on it.

"Come on, Kristen," she pleaded.

Kristen's eyes were locked on the sight before her. The witch's hair hung down to her shoulders. It was long and stringy. Her nose too, was long and crooked, with a wart on the end that dangled like a raindrop. Her teeth were ugly and discolored. She just stared at the girls for a moment.

"What do you want?" She asked in a raspy voice.

The girls were too frightened to answer.

"Well ... speak!" the witch commanded.

Lona moved to position herself behind Kristen.

"Oh, I see," the witch added, "You've come for a treat, eh?"

Kristen swallowed a lump that had crept into her throat, and summoned the courage to answer from deep down within.

"No, we haven't come for a treat. We got lost, and we're trying to find our way back home," she stammered.

"What's that?" asked the witch, "Closer; come nearer," she added, opening the outer door.

The girls moved a step backward.

"I can't hear so good," the witch said. "Speak louder, child. You're looking for what?"

Kristen and Lona held their distance.

"We've sort of lost our bearing," Kristen yelled. "Can you tell us if this road will take us to town?"

The witch bent over and tried to look around the door. "Why don't you come inside," she motioned, "where I can hear you better. Why, all those noisy crickets and toads are making such a terrible racket, I can't hear a word you are saying."

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Kristen could feel Lona shaking. She turned to her young friend, but knew without asking, that Lona would have nothing to do with going inside.

She turned quickly back to the witch, and replied, "No thank you. We're sorry we troubled you. We best be going."

Lona began walking backward, too frightened to take her eyes off of the witch. She was pulling Kristen with her.

"Wait!" called the witch.

The girls kept their eyes glued on her.

The witch let go of the door, and put her hands to her head. She yanked her hair, and started pulling it down over her face.

The girls watched in horror, as she peeled her hair and face off.

"I forgot about my mask," she said in a kinder voice, now. "I'm terribly sorry," she added. "I must have terrified you." she chuckled, holding the mask in her hand.

The light shining through the doorway revealed a younger looking woman, who now spoke with a pleasant voice. The ugly witch's face dangled harmlessly in her hand.

“I was getting ready for a Halloween party. You must forgive me. Please, do come inside ... I'm sure I can help you.”

The girls were relieved and advanced up the steps, satisfied that their hostess was indeed a much more pleasant person.

“That is an awesome mask,” Kristen said, “It sure fooled me.”

“Me too,” added Lona. “I was shaking so hard, I thought my costume would fall off.”

The woman laughed. “Well, I do hope I can have the same affect at the party, tonight. I just love Halloween. It's a pity it only comes once a year.”

The girls entered the house, while their hostess held the door.

"Once is enough for me," Lona quipped.

“Ditto, for me,” Kristen added.