



## V: The Force is With Us

Written by Sarah Darer Littman and illustrated by Jerry Craft

Norm brushed dust off his shirt.

“Good work finding that slide,” he said. Then he noticed Thomas staring at the castle behind him. The boy’s face was ashen. “What’s the matter?”

“It’s g-gone...and Li-Ming...She’s *still inside!*”

Norm swung around and gasped. The castle had disappeared again, leaving them in a field containing a geodesic dome.

“How can we rescue Li-Ming if we don’t know where she is?” Thomas fretted. “What if Iona finally got her spell right and Gillette Castle is in *Scotland*?”

“That would complicate rescue efforts,” Norm agreed. “But if she didn’t – and I’m hoping that’s the case – where might she accidentally send the castle next?”

“So far Iona’s magic fails sent the castle to Sleeping Giant State Park in New Haven, Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford, and this place,” Thomas observed.

“Dinosaur State Park in Rocky Hill,” Norm said, pointing at the geodesic dome. “That’s the Exhibit Center.”

Norm suddenly felt a strange tingling emitting from the direction of the dome.

“Do you feel that?”

“Feel what?” Thomas paced, pretend smoking the pipe as he imagined Sherlock Holmes would do while pondering clues in a case.

“According to my deductions,” he said, “if the castle doesn’t go to Scotland, it should turn up at another major Connecticut landmark.”

“Well, that only leaves us with *hundreds* of places to search,” Norm said. “Between state parks and historic sites – we’ve got tourist attractions coming out of our ears!”

*That tingling sensation is definitely getting stronger*, he thought. “Are you sure you don’t feel anything?”

But Thomas had already resumed his pacing. “If I were Gillette Castle, where would I go next?” he muttered.

His deductive musings were interrupted by a loud humming noise coming from the dome.

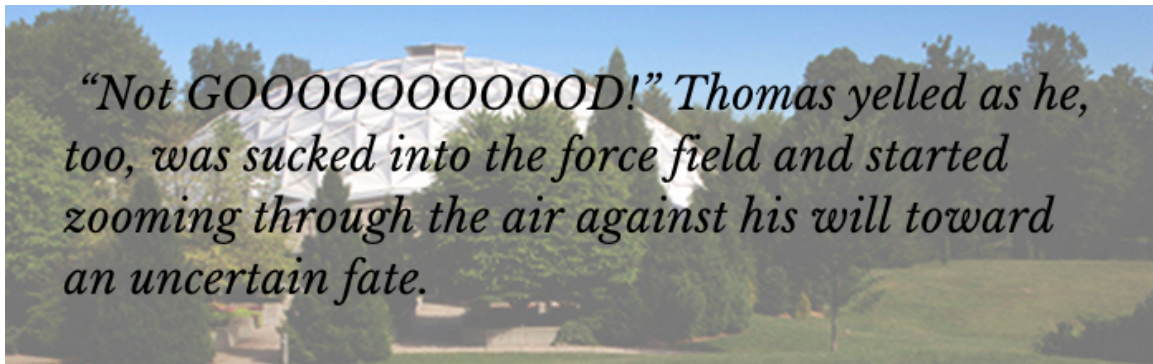
“Now do you feel it?” Norm said. His hair – or what was left of it – stood on end.

Without warning, the briarwood pipe was sucked out from Thomas’ mouth. It flew in the direction in the dome, narrowly missing Norm’s nose, closely followed by the deerstalker, which was swept off Thomas’ head by the invisible force.

The humming noise became unbearably loud, twinned with eardrum-busting vibrations.

“What’s happening?” Thomas shouted to Norm over the racket. “It feels like there’s an invisible hand pulling us.”

“I...think...there.../SSSSS,” Norm screamed as his legs finally gave into the strength of the force field and he found himself flying toward the dome at high speed.



It looked like their plan to rescue Li-Ming was going to have to be put on hold.

\* \* \*

Li-Ming stared at the closet wall. The hidden door must have closed when the castle moved, and now she was trapped – and alone. Thomas and Norm were back at Dinosaur State Park and she was now stuck at an undetermined location with two newbie wizards trying to transport one of Connecticut’s state treasures back to Scotland for Lady Something or Other. *Not your average school field trip*, she thought.

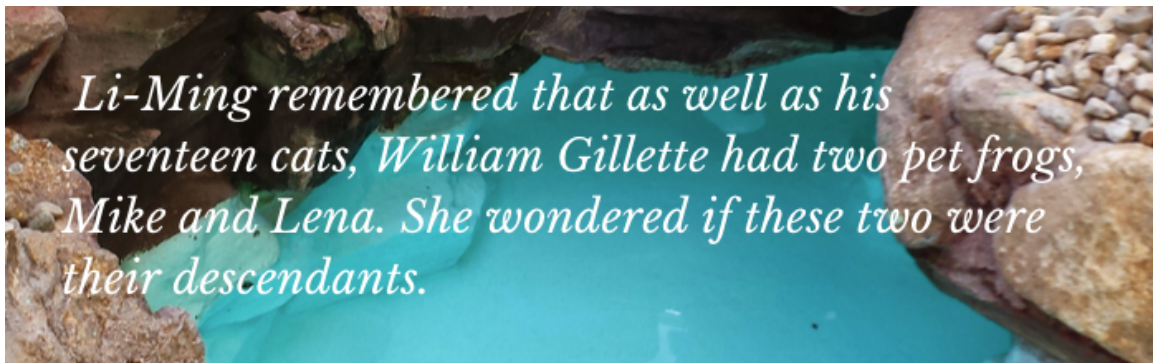
She pushed open the closet door slightly and listened. No more velociraptor skeleton noises. No Iona and Jasper either. But Li-Ming did hear another sound coming from the room outside the closet door.

*Ribbit. Ribbit.*

Li-Ming crept out of the closet. Sitting on the bed were two frogs.

“Ribbit!” croaked the bigger frog.

“Ribbit, Ribbit!” replied the smaller frog.



She didn't have much time to wonder, because just then there was an explosion of white light and the bedroom door flew open. Iona stood in the doorway, her wand pointed directly at Li-Ming.

“I’ve got you now, my pretty!” she hissed. “Where are your friends?”



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