



**In the middle of June, the school year had finally ended.** Now that they'd finished their third grade obligations, the triplets Von Wink-Wink finally had time to prepare for their long-anticipated road trip.

Evelyn pulled out a map. "We need to decide on the route."

Eugenie dragged an enormous suitcase behind her. "We need to pack our clothes."

"We won't know what clothes are suitable until we decide where we're going," Evelyn reminded her and handed the map to Evgeniy.

He unfolded it across the bedroom floor. "And if we plan to camp anywhere, we'll have to pack a tent."

The girls joined their brother on the floor and surveyed the towns along spaghetti-like roads that wound around mountains and lakes and skirted the wide Cerulean Sea. Evelyn pointed to one dot. "I think we can easily reach Madrigal by the first afternoon. In the center of town there they have a giant ball of yarn and enormous knitting needles. We can visit before pitching our tent in the musical park on the Oriole River."

“That would be fine, Evie,” Eugenie said. “As long as we can spend the next night in Hollyoak and stay in the little inn on the Fingerling Lake. The next morning we can hike the trails in the Llama Mountains where they say the animals walk the terraced land from top to bottom.”

Evgeniy spoke up. “As long as we don’t miss Travailsavania.”

Evelyn moved her face closer to the map. “What’s there?”

“It’s full of creatures that are only mildly frightening and there’s a great house that takes in travelers just on the other side of the mountains. A man lives in the belfry of the house and every night he serves tomato juice to the guests and tells them stories of the woods. According to my guide book, the insects are particularly thick and annoying and have even been known to carry small dogs away.”

“Ugh,” Eugenie said, scratching her forearm. “So let’s not camp there, though I would like to hear from the man if he knows a lot about the woods.”

“Children, what are you doing?”

All three looked up to see their mother standing in the doorway, holding a tray of cookies and lemonade that she then proceeded to set on the small table by the window. The three children got up from the floor to take their respective seats around the table. “We’re planning our road trip,” Evelyn said just before popping a crisp almond sandy into her mouth.

“Ah. And when are you leaving?”

Evgeniy finished chewing his peanut butter thin crisp before answering. “We leave on Saturday.”

“Saturday? But the road trip your father and I are planning doesn’t start until August.”

“We’ll be back long before then, Mother. No later than the middle of July.”

Eugenie finished off her glass of lemonade with a few sprigs of fresh mint.

Their mother took a seat in one of the small chairs at the table and picked up a lime meringue to enjoy for herself. “It’s important that you’ll be back before August. Tell me about the places you plan to go.”

Evgeniy started. “Of course we’ll travel the Earthworm Highway. The clouds above it are fluffier than clouds you’ll find anywhere.”

“And they’re multi-colored, just like all of the shirts we wear.” Evelyn tugged on her sleeve to make the point. The triplets never wore anything but multicolored tops in pastel colors and tan shorts or pants to go with them, although they never dressed exactly alike.

“We definitely plan to stop at the bubblegum museum in Toothacre Falls.”

Eugenie had brought the map with her and studied it carefully through her thick glasses.

“And I hear that the gift shop has gum from all over the world.” Evgeniy’s lips curled upward just thinking about the possibilities.

“Well, it sounds like a marvelous trip for all of you.” Mother Von Wink-Wink smiled in that way the triplets had learned meant that she didn’t take them seriously at all.

“Can we have some of these cookies to take with us?” Evelyn asked and the other two quickly agreed.

“I’ll ask your father. Saturday is his baking day and I’m sure he can make a dozen more.”

“I hope he can do it on Friday, Mother,” Eugenie said. “We’ll be leaving Saturday morning and he would have to get up very early to give them to us before we leave.”

“I’ll tell him that.” Their mother lifted the tray from the table and took it from the room.

Evgeniy brushed a few crumbs from his cheek. “I do hope that Father has time to make the cookies before we leave.”

“Me, too,” Evelyn added. “What a nice treat that would be once we get on the road.”

Eugenie drained the lemonade from her glass and, as the ice cubes tinkled, said, “We definitely should fill up our pitcher with lemonade.”

“Or limeade. Maybe we should make it so that Mother doesn’t have to.” Evgeniy finished his own glass.

After deciding that the girl’s beds wouldn’t be big enough, the Triplets Von Wink-Wink loaded the top bunk of Evgeniy’s, piling it high with sheets and tent poles and clothing for all types of weather, including their matching green jackets, and small gifts to share with those they met along the way. They packed tea sets and balls of all sizes, from soccer to tennis balls, and attached to the back the large ones they used to bounce around the backyard. They lined up all the animals they’d take with them on the floor beside the bed so that Evgeniy would have room to sleep before they left.

On Friday evening after dinner, their father handed Evelyn two sacks. “I made you something to take on your...” He held up his hands and dipped two fingertips on each to make a quote as he said, “‘trip.’ You should only have one tonight and save the rest. All right?”

“Yes, papa,” Evelyn said, choosing her favorite lime and basil.

“Only one, papa,” Eugenie told him after she popped one in her mouth and shook powdered sugar off her fingertips.

Evgeniy carefully studied the contents of both sacks before finally pulling out a fig shortbread. “These look like the best cookies you’ve ever baked, papa.”

“Thank you, Evgeniy. Now finish your cookies. It’s time for bed.”

The next morning, just after the sun rose above the horizon, Francesca and Georgio Von Wink-Wink stirred only slightly when they heard the clattering and then the slight rumbling coming from the room just below them. The rev of an engine finally caused them both to sit straight up in bed and look at each other in disbelief. As the sound grew louder, it drove them toward the window where they saw the top of a bunk bed filled with suitcases and bundles moving down the road.

The children returned home, safe and sound, just before the fourth of July.