

Rainbow Skittle Unicorn Land

Snowflakes drifted down to the mystical land of unicorns. Lakes froze into skating rinks, trees wore it like vanilla frosting, and wary-eyed store managers marked up the prices on fruit, cots, and sweaters. The hibernation crowd was at hand.

The unicorns here were not uniformly horses. Reindicorns, rabbicorns, owlicorns, and more shared the land. They made a mixed culture in species, but they all bore a foot-long horn on their foreheads, and these horns had different functions.

Some had horns that dispensed condiments. These critters were especially popular at meal times when the ketchup bottles went dry. Still others had horns that held power tools. They were put to work when the lawn mower went out. And others had horns that did nothing at all. Their nominal job was to stand near the door and hang up guests' coats. Occasionally, they'd lie on the ground as the pole in a game of horseshoes, but most of the horsicorns saw this as a terrible waste of shoes, even if hibernation was on the approach.

Now, hibernation was a critical winter tradition. It was held in a giant underground igloo marked with the letter "L". The annual slumber was important because no matter what purpose a horn served, it was sure to run out by the end of the year. By then, the confeticorns only popped out whisps of scant paper, and the flypapicorns trapped scarcely a dozen flies among themselves.

There was one ponicorn, however, who thought she'd sit it out this year. Her name was Crystal, and she, for one, would like to know what went on overground while the rest were asleep.

"Well, I could tell you that, forwards and backwards," said a Walricorn friend. The two of them were walking down a seldom-tred path in the forrest. The snow had been coming down in droves, and the rest of the land were either already in the igloo or fighting at Horsely Worsely over the supposedly more comfortable haybeds. "While you're all in Sleepy Hole, the Headless Horse comes to destroy the world."

"Wait, what?"

".dlrow eht yortsed ot semoc esroH sseldaeH eht ,eloH ypeelS ni lla er'uoy elihW"

"Yeah, I heard you when you said it forwards. I couldn't help but notice, but when winter's all over and spring begins, the world is still there. Does he rebuild it when he's all done blowing it up?"

"No, silly Crystal. He doesn't destroy it because he thinks it's a barren wasteland. And I don't blame him. I mean, look at all this snow!"

They'd been leaving hoof- and flipper-prints so deep that they could have reached Albuquerque if they'd stood there any longer. By now, all of the supermarket warriors had cast down their shopping carts and settled for the next best things. They'd be on their own, Crystal and Wulmbert. The Kingdom was their winter resort. Theirs, and this supposedly headless terror from space.

"I take it he only apocalypsizes populated planets?"

"As long as there's someone important around."

Wulmbert had been banished from the yearly three-month sleep. His bald shiney horn, prior to the court ruling, had been a party hat-dispenser, but he used it as a slingshot at a banquet, and splattered the

mayor's sugar cube salad. Wulmbert said that he was only trying to stop a fly from landing in it, but the ordeal was so embarrassing that the mayor put a restraining order on him, stating that he could never be in the same room (read: sleeping facility) with him again.*

*The official court ruling read, "We understand that this means that Mr. Cafe will never recharge his horn as long as he lives, but seeing that his only grows party hats and our mayor's shoots missiles, we see it best that the mayor get *his* rest."

"Do you ever miss making hats?" said Crystal.

"Do I ever! Every year Headless Harvey's here, I offer him one before I remember I can't deliver. He gets so mad he says he'll never come back."

"But you see him every year."

"I do. He doesn't mean to come back, but don't forget, it's very hard to navigate with a missing head."

The snow stopped falling. Most likely, the rest were taking hardy doses of monthquill, which would last until the December / January intermission. They'd stay in the cave, unless they heard some kind of havoc outside. Then they'd still stay in the cave, but sleep with a lot more worry.

"Say, let me ask *you* a question," said Wulmbert. "What about *your* horn? Aren't you missing out on the big recharge?"

"Not when *this* is my special power."

Crystal unscrewed her horn and removed a spyglass. She hardly used it, as she lived in an observatory and would rather watch comets than goaticorns fight over mountain turf. Skipping hibernation was perfectly practical for her.

"Wow," said Wulmbert. "That telescope there sure got shrunk over the year. You'd better get some rest."

Still, she'd best not make a habit of it. She didn't want to end up like Wulmbert.

"I think I'd better get some rest," she said. She took the trail back to the observatory. Before going in, she turned back to the forrest and peeked through the spyglass. She couldn't see a blooming thing because the lens was fogged up. So much for it. Well, if she'd ever need to use it, then a few full sleeps ought to keep it in function.

The next morning, before dawn broke, she heard childish voices outside, then felt disappointed that her "sit out hibernation" idea wasn't so original after all. Then, once she looked out on the situation below, she was mad because these people decided to use their apparent solitude to steal from her home. Outside was a foxicorn carrying away lumber from the wood shed. Her accomplice was a penguicorn with a wingload of lighter fluid. Wulmbert carried the matches.

Crystal threw open the window. "I thought you were my friend! How dare you!"

Wulmbert nearly dropped his matches. The other two *did* drop their spoil, blamed Wulmbert for telling them the place was vacant, then said he could carry the stuff himself, as he was the strongest. They fled towards the woods, where Wulmbert tried to make quick his escape!

"Not so fast!" Grabbing her bedsheets to use as a parachute, Crystal hopped out the window and steered herself towards Wulmbert. He tried to run, but she clutched his neck by her legs and drove him face first into the snow.

"So my observatory is vacant, huh? Yeah, it is, except for me. What's the big idea?"

Wulmbert mumbled something unintelligible. With a groan, Crystal got off him and pulled his head out of the snow by his horn. "What?"

He spat out the snow. "I'm sorry! Your skipping out on this year's hibe hub-bub slipped my mind."

"Did it also slip your mind that I chopped that wood myself?"

Wulmbert jerked from her grip.

"There's no time for that now. We gotta free a poor fella what was drinking from the lake right before it froze."

He snatched the bedsheets, swept up the stolen goods, then wobbled full steam towards a distant lake where the other thiefficorns comforted a brat on the bank of a frozen lake. He really had been drinking from it right before it froze.

"Wulmbert, you spilled the beans. I wanted to spend this Winter alone."

He wasn't listening. He threw the logs onto the bearicorn's tongue and soaked the mess with a full can of fluid. In lighting a match, he had little success. In fact, he had none, but he didn't give up. After the fifth match went out, Crystal intervened.

"Hold it, hold it, hold it. You're trying to light a fire right in front of this guy's face. You'd better not, or that horse you told me about won't be the only headless thing around here."

"Naw nay-nis Thiltha," said the bearicorn. "Whathoo ya nee, heableth?"

"Don't talk, dear," said the foxicorn. "His name is Silver, and what do you mean, headless?"

"Forget it," said Crystal, "it's an inside joke. Now, since you robbed me, you owe me a few explanations -- first of all, who are you? We're spending the next three months together. We might as well know each others' names."

The penguicorn curtseyed. "I'm Pixel. I was frozen today too, but I pecked myself free."

"I'm Kittydog Puppypat," said the foxicorn, whom Crystal now noticed had features similar to a cat's. "I was also stuck right over there, where all that shredded ice is piled up. I clawed my tongue free. Free of the ice, that is, not from my mouth."

"I noticed. Well, I'm Crystal and that's Wulmbert, just in case he forgot to tell you his name."

Wulmbert dropped the matchbox and sniffed. "Dumb, dumb, dumb."

"I camp thih heal thorether," whined Silver, "I gobba geb three!"

"By the way," said Wulmbert, staring whistfully at his unignited campfire mess, "none of you scamps are important, are you?"

Kittydog hung her head. "We're all important, at least in some context." She pulled a tissue from her horn and offered it to a bawling Wulmbert.

Pixel waved her wings in concerned reproval. "Careful, Kitty. You should only have three or four left. We need to make them last all Winter."

Youthicorns usually had a third more horn power in reserve. Hibernation was not quite as urgent for them, but Crystal couldn't imagine relying on one tissue all season.

"Well, what about you, Pixel? What's your power?"

"Ine theleouth!" Silver struggled for attention.

"I release sleeping pills. Sorry I can't demonstrate, but they work on everyone except for me, so if someone ever needs a slight recharge, I just hope it won't be me."

"I hope," said Crystal, "that it won't be anybody. Well, Wulmbert needs recharging. He's been needing it for years, but don't give him any pills, he's not allowed any sleep."

"Gee, Crystal," Wulmbert's tears had now frozen to his plump, silky cheeks. "You're humongously wise, but your wisdom humongously hurts."

"By the way, don't get the wrong idea. I might need to use a pill or two later. Hey may be out here against his will, but I'm not. I *chose* to sit out the hibernation. I'm *curious* about what's going on up here. I'm a *scientific* observer."

A tree fell in the forrest across the lake, and had there been no one around to hear it, it would not have made a sound. But it *did* make a sound; the sound of a voiceless laughter. It was a corrosive, blackening sound that was more absent than present, and those 'corns whose tongues weren't stuck to the ice made for the bushes.

Pixel whimpered a bit, but Kittydog shushed her and gasped. "We forgot to take Silver!"

"He can take care of himself," said Crystal. "Whatever comes out, he can just throw logs at it, or gore it with his horn."

"I'm tellin' you," insisted Wulmbert, "it's Headless Harvey."

"Wulmbert, how do you expect me to believe--"

Anoter tree fell, much closer than the first. They not only heard it, but they saw it, and they saw what had caused it as well.

A horse stepped into the clearing, raven black with red muffs on his ankles. His hooves glistened in the watchful dawn sun as if they'd been oiled and polished. His tail was a swishing brush that had certainly taken down any number of unsuspecting insects. But as with all creatures, his head was the most important part, for wherever it was, it was not growing out of his neck.

"Hello?" His voice was a rebounding war drum. "Anyone of Earth-shattering importance around here?"

"No, not me!" Kittydog hopped from the bushes. "I'm not imp--"

Pixel and Crystal jumped her, yanking tissues from her horn and stuffing them into her mouth.

"What ho? Who dare go?"

Crystal took out her spyglass to affirm his headlessness. She was seated on Kittydog's head so the girl couldn't blab. Oddly, the spyglass seemed to shrink his image. She looked through the big end. That didn't enlarge him either.

Pixel clung to Wulmbert. "Are you sure he doesn't have a head?"

Crystal shushed her, but it was too late.

"You! Vociferous Folk!" He cantered straight for them. "Enact your importance before me now that I may challenge it sternly!"

All of the "vocal" now came from Silver, crying out in fear and pulling like taffy from his lake mistake. Kittydog gave Crystal a sneak-pinch, freeing herself to shout as she pleased.

"Oh, poor headless fiend, you are as important as anycorn here, so won't you wreak havoc on yourself instead? Oh, poor stupid Silver, don't you remember your specialty? If ever there was a time to use it, now would be it, so uncap your horn, and let what's in come out."

Silver did just that. Not that the rest of them could see what had caused it, but a great huge fire arose in front of their friend. With warmth on his side, he pulled himself free, just as the Headless Horse reached the ice.

He slipped and struggled, facing an inevitable slide through Silver's fire. Though frantic and ballistic his struggle was, its aim was not so much to change his direction as it was to stand. To preserve his dignity, as it were. However important it was that he stand, its best implementation was a graceful pass through the flames.

"Ah! An importance of infernal degree!"

"Yeah," said Silver. "I'd say I put 200 degrees in there."

The Headless Horse's struggle was now one of escape, at first unlikely because of the ice, then impossible because the ice shattered. He fell through, granting all of the rest an escape.

They went to the attic of the observatory and sat on her bed. Crystal watched the lake as "Headless Harvey" splashed around. "Hapless" Harvey was more like it. With no head to house it, he must not have had a brain. He eventually *did* crawl out of the ice. Crystal put her ear to the telescope and heard, "Setting my person ablaze -- that is indeed monumental importance! For that, I shall annihilate this planet!"

And yet no one got to write out their will.

"Nice going, everyone but me." Crystal sighed and slumped into an antique chair. "Why were you drinking from that lake in the first place?"

"We were very thirsty," explained Pixel.

"Yeah, but for lake water?"

"Y'all guys, we're all in danger now, I'll say," said Wulmbert. "We can't be arguing over lake-licking at a time like this."

Crystal sighed. She apologized for apportioning blame, but she secretly condoned offering Silver as a compensation sacrifice, as he was the one who sealed their fate with his fire antics.

"What do we do?" said Pixel. "I promised my sister she could have my sea shell collection when she came of age, which will be this Spring."

"We've all made promises we can't keep." Kittydog patted Pixel's shoulder.

Silver hopped to his feet. "I haven't! Uh... haven't made any promises, period. But me and my blow torch had plans, man. Haven't you guys ever made plans?"

"We need to make one now," Crystal clapped her hooves together. "How to make the headless guy not destroy the world. Brainstorm, guys."

Kittydog spoke before she thought, as usual. "We could put a lot of wanted posters up around town."

Wulmbert spoke and didn't think at all. "You and I'll hit that off right off the bat!"

They skipped hand-in-hand out the door.

"O--keeeey..." Crystal was well rid of them. She couldn't concentrate with Wulmbert in the room anyway. "Everyone else, think of something useful."

Silver snapped his fingers. "We could obliterate that guy once and for all."

Pixel rolled her eyes. "You already set him on fire. If that didn't do it, I'm pretty sure he's invincible."

Silver folded his arms and grumbled. "Just because he fell in the water."

He was not only invincible, he was angry and invincible, and they should have known that by the fact that he didn't need a head to survive. What else could he do without a head? He could talk, and he could apparently hear, too. Outside, he galloped at full steam towards the village the way a cockroach might scurry towards a cluster of dollhouses. Crystal wondered if a negotiation would do any good.

"Maybe we could reason with him."

"With a headless man?" Pixel snickered. "Far too craniosophically unlikely."

"Huh? Whatever. Look, Wulmbert knows this guy personally. I wonder if he could talk him out of it."

Silver cackled himself off the bed. "Listen to you! Wulmbert couldn't talk rotten fruit out of stinking, and you want him to save the world? What a joke!"

"No, I'm serious. Take a look through this." She handed over her spyglass, which had convinced her the value of a good quarter year's sleep. Pixel used it properly, displaying the appropriate amount of disappointment when she couldn't read a list of letters that Crystal held up. Silver, on the other hand, swung it around like a pirate sword. He shattered much of Crystal's hope for the next generation of boys.

"So, you're saying we should bop him on the bean with this?"

"Hopeless. Completely hopeless." Crystal took her spyglass back. "He doesn't have a bean to bop, remember?"

"Well, um..." Silver hated looking dumb. "Maybe he didn't bring it with him, but what kind of person doesn't have a head at all? That's just crazy."

"Silver, leave the room please."

Silver huffed and puffed. "Yeah, sure I'll leave the room. But I'll come back to gloat!" He walked out the door. "Invincible? Ha! I'll barbecue that horse, good and crispy. And when I do, I'm not sharing!"

The two smarty-corns went to the window to see if he'd really go out to the village. Instead, they saw Wulmbert and Kittydog, carrying a stack of papers with the enthusiasm of a pizza delivery man. Even though those two disappeared among the stables and barnhouses, the brash and brazen Silver never made an appearance along the same path.

"He's probably turned chicken," said Pixel, though she was the one with feathers and a beak.

"I can trust you, Pixel." Crystal patted her shoulder. "You've got a steady head, a level head. You don't rush into things."

Pixel blushed. "Grownups never say things like that to me. They admire Silver's courage, and they adore Kittydog's charisma, but I guess I'm just not very important."

The sun had risen, but the clouds kept it out of sight. If she looked through her telescope, Crystal could see the mixture of prints leading into the village. She saw those sporadic ones left by the headless horse, whose world-destroying capacity she now questioned. She saw the pawprints of Kittydog, and Wulmbert's flipperprints. It was a practical salad of prints.

"I wonder," said Crystal. "If he doesn't have a head, what does he have?"

Pixel looked up and squinted before she answered, showing the inner workings of a response so carefully thought out that it multiplied Crystal's trust by two hundred and sixty-five. "What does he have?" said Pixel. "A bad temper. And a self-esteem problem to cause it."

"Yeah, but I mean, how can he walk and talk and actually bother to care about anything important?"

It sounded foolish when it came out, as the thing that Harvey thought was important enough to destroy the world was a bear who was too fraidy-cat to go outside. The important thing was, he wasn't headless. There was a head somewhere around, it was just not on Harvey's neck.

"Silver was right," said Crystal.

"Uh-oh," Pixel dove into the bed, bursting the pillow when she tried to bury her head. "Now I've got low self-esteem."

"Don't lose your head now, I may need it later. Right now, we've got to talk to Wulmbert."

They left the observatory for the village. Before doing so, they passed Silver in the corridor. "Don't go out there!" He warned them, but Pixel turned her nose up. "Chicken," she said. "FRIED chicken. Fried, fried, fried-chick!" But Crystal urged her along.

When they came to the village, they saw immediate proof that Harvey had indeed been there and proof that Kitty and Wulmbert left their mark. It was hard to tell which was which at first; They saw holes and dents in the buildings and litter everywhere. But as it turned out, the structural damage was from Harvey running into them. The litter was actually "Wanted" posters, signified by a blank sheet of paper with the word "wanted" written along the bottom. The spelling was quite impressive for a person of Wulmbert's intellect, but he probably asked Kittydog, or more likely asked her to write it herself while he "drew" the picture.

The two of them, Wulmbert and Kittydog, were standing in the middle of town square, admiring their handiwork. Wulmbert was especially proud. "Yessiree, it's just the spittin' image."

"So you drew that?" said Crystal. "I thought I recognized your style."

"I did a few myself," said Kittydog. "I hope the resemblance is strong enough."

A loud "bonk" interrupted them, and they turned to see Harvey stagger around near a coffee shop. The wall next to the door had a few bricks displaced; it was concave from where he had rammed it.

"Ah, another steadfast and sturdy monument!" he said. "You are of stout importance, dire edifice, but you shall crumble! Behold! I seek temples of feebler constitution."

He attacked the building next door with similar results, then did the same to its neighbor. On the fourth try he actually did crash through, but that was only because he'd found a glass window.

"Victory! Witness this collapse and tremble, all ye who dwell here; such is how I shall render the rest of this world, little by little, until all is laid waste!" He fled to the house across the road, smacked into the concrete wall, made a speech, then moved on.

"Does he do that every year?" asked Crystal.

Wulmbert shook his head. "This is how's he'll destroy the world."

"Well, he won't get very far."

"Because we'll stop him," said Kittydog. "Right? We'll save the world from this poor foolish animal."

"No. Seriously, stop. He won't destroy the world. Throw a rock up in the air, and it will swim to the moon before that guy destroys the world." She walked up to the building with the broken window. It was lens store, one she frequented to replace her telescope lenses. "Oh, but he will destroy our reputations. The rest of the town will think we did this damage."

"No they won't." Kittydog pointed at the wanted posters.

"Kitty, by the time they all wake up, Harvey will be dead from too many broken bones. We'll be left with a headless corpse on our hands and a ton of broken windows. What do you think will happen then?"

"I'll show them this." Kittydog tore down a wanted poster and pointed at the headless mugshot above the word "wanted."

Crystal turned to Pixel. "Never, ever leave me."

"Well you guys left *me*, you practically ditched me back there." Silver road up on a bicycle. "Have you guys noticed all the holes around here?"

"Silver, if I tell you you were right about something, will you follow my orders? The rest of you don't have any choice, but Silver, have we got a deal?"

He shivered. "You're not going to send me back there alone, are you? I'll do anything except that."

Good. She didn't have to admit he was right. Headless Harvey did have a head, they just couldn't see it the way they looked at him. It was a pivotal fact, and she'd rather not credit Silver with suggesting it.

"Okay, here's the deal. I'm going to have a look down that hole between Harvey's shoulders, but first, I'm going to need a few hours of sleep to recharge my spyglass. Pixel, I need the rest of your sleeping pills to accomplish this." Tears crept to the brim of Pixel's eyes. Crystal knew she'd just given her an overwhelming sense of importance. "I need the rest of you to go to my observatory so that I can find you when I wake up. Be sure to stay in a room with a phone, I might need your help in a few days."

Wulmbert drooped a little, and Kittydog put on a similarly despondant show. Silver scratched his head.

"Wait a minute, where are you going to sleep?"

"Secret." She held out her hand for the pills. Pixel popped her horn off like a cork. She then shook out three pills, one with an asteroid belt on it, one with a nebula, and another with the surface of Saturn all over it. It was almost a shame she'd have to eat them. She shoo'd them all back to the observatory, then she fled to a remote hotel where she lay down for what she hoped was an adequate sleep.

When she woke up, she thought for a moment that she'd be getting up alongside a roommate. She had dreamed that the hibernation igloo was a giant prison for people who stayed up past their bedtime, and that she'd been forced to room with the noisiest prisoner ever, a hornless frump who'd dropped her chain-ball on the ground every other minute.

Then a question struck her like lightning: Did Harvey's missing head even have a horn on it?

She looked out the window, and, speak of the devil, Harvey was ramming a single spot repeatedly, saying things like, "I'll topple you yet, pompous entity!" and "You weary me so, but I still

stand!" He still stood, but he stood wobbly. He wouldn't be standing for long. Crystal checked her robes. Yes, she'd taken only two sleeping pills so as not to be greedy. So long as her spyglass was a little more functional. She picked up the phone and called the observatory.

"Hello? Wulmbert? I need you and the rest over here as soon as possible. I think Harvey's about to faint."

He was still attacking that wall when she walked out the door, but he wasn't making any progress. It, however, had made much progress on him, removing patches of his coat and rubbing him raw as he pressed against it. Crystal tossed the last sleeping pill down his neck hole, which slumbered him instantaneously. Then she steadied her spyglass and had a look.

As she'd expected, she saw a head down there. But she saw a little more than that. She also saw a strong pair of arms and a torso. Whatever it was did not have a horn. It was more like a beakless bird with extra feathers around its chin and forehead. It was wearing a headset with a microphone, which was probably how he'd been able to hear and talk.

"Gee wiz. Just wait until the rest get a load of this. Where are they, anyway?"

"Over at Mrs. Wilson's cottage."

Crystal looked up, and there was Pixel.

"Mrs. Wilson? So I was talking into a dead phone?"

Pixel looked down at the ground. "The others wanted to feel important."

She pointed to a cloud of smoke in the sky. "Silver set Kittydog's tissues on fire, and they wanted to signal you so that you'd know where they were."

Crystal sighed. "Well, this bum's asleep. He does have a head, as well as half a whole other body attached to it, down there." Pixel lightened up and saw for herself. "Oh, wait, you need the spyglass to see it."

"No I don't. He's got headphones, too. Hmm, I wonder what his story is. What's wrong with his face? It's bald in some places."

Crystal took another look, without the spyglass, then with the spyglass again. The object did nothing to enhance her scope, so she threw it over her shoulder and bonked someone on the head. It wasn't a fellow stowaway.

"Hey, what's the big idea, lady?" It was a construction worker, sent up to investigate the noise Harvey had been causing. "Why aren't either of you in hibernation?"

"Did you see our signal?" Kittydog came running over. "We tried to signal you, but you never answered. You see it now didn't you?"

"Kittydog, whose idea was it to leave the observatory? Yours?"

Wulmbert was coming, too, along with Silver. "Man, sitting out hibernation is such a bore. You say you do this every year?"

Wulmbert gave Harvey a pat on the flank. "It ain't so bad when ya got the right sort of company."

"Yeah," said Crystal. "The kind of company who vandalizes the town."

The construction man. Looked around the place. "Yeah, I'll say. I'm gonna have to get my brothers up if you want this place fixed. Try to keep it down, all right?"

He turned to leave, but Kittydog called him back. "Oh, Mister, don't go. We are innocent and helpless, we can't be left alone with that... that..." She couldn't find the right word, so she merely pointed at Harvey. As loud as he'd been awake, he was a mercifully snoreless sleeper.

"What's an insomniac centaur doing here?" Said Mr. Construction.

"He came to destroy the world," explained Wulmbert. "He does it every Winter, but he never went through with it, until he found out how important we were."

Mr. Construction could have turned to stone. His eyes grow so wide that, for a second, Crystal was afraid they'd turn into black holes and swallow them all in.

"You? He thought you were important?" Then he laughed himself into a heart attack, out of a heart attack, into a burst appendix, and out of an opportunity to visit the latrine.

"You'd better just be laughing at Wulmbert," said Crystal.

"Hey," said Silver, looking down the Harvey Hole, "I think he's getting bigger."

The rest of the gang, except for hyena horse, crowded around Harvey's neck as his upper torso indeed grew larger and large, closer and closer.

"Hey, hey, listen, guys, listen to me." Their guest stopped laughing long enough to explain. "Unicorns' horns lose power when they don't get good sleep, right? Well, centaurs shrink up at the top when they skip out on their naps. That's what's going on here."

"What ho? Who dare go?"

Harvey hopped up and wandered around, then bumped into a wall.

"We do," said Kittydog. "We dare come, too."

They also dared leave a house without putting out a fire they'd lit, but that wasn't relevant yet.

"Release me from this encasement!" Harvey stomped his foot. "I shall destroy the world should you not set me free!"

"Hold your horseflies, feller." The construction man pulled a rope from his horn. "Here, tie this around your waste. The rest of you, take a hold of him."

There wasn't enough room for Harvey to move his arms. Kittydog had to do part of the tying, but Silver had to do the rest. Kittydog wasn't strong enough to tighten the knot. Then began a tug of war to release Harvey's upper half. The construction man held a metal railing while the rest pulled him towards the cave. It was like tugging an old fashioned carriage full of sumo wrestlers, but after a minute of straining and sweating, Harvey's horse half lurched, the tuggers collapsed, and his anthropomorphic half was in full view.

The construction worker had done his part, so he went back to the cave. The three kids were also proud of themselves, having all assisted in some way, so they joined him to finish up their hibernation. Crystal and Wulmbert, on the other hand, thought Harvey had some explaining to do. They stuck around to hear it.

"What's the big idea?" said Crystal. "Don't tell me you're just cranky from a lack of sleep. You've got a lot of nerve ramming into town buildings like this. People work here, you know."

Harvey twiddled his thumbs. "'Twas score year since that the chief of my tribe forbade me another winter's sleep in the grand stable, basing his decree on my occupation of 'sports announcer.'"

"You're banished too?" Wulmbert was overjoyed. "I'm banished! We've got so much in common we could be twins!"

"You mean including destroying buildings?" Crystal pointed to the growing smoke cloud.

"You know what?" Said Wulmbert. "Let's trade places. Sure, you can't sleep in your town, but nobody here knows that. And I'll go over there!"

"Not before you put that fire out," said Crystal.

"Sorry, Crys!" Wulmbert waddled off towards the town's exit. "I've got a hibe to hitch!"

He was gone before anyone could remind him that Harvey's home was on another planet. Oh well. So long as he found somewhere to sleep for three straight months, his party hats should come back.

Harvey wasn't going anywhere just yet. Not from Crystal's point of view. "Hey Harvey, you want to feel important?"

"What mean you, feel? I am important!"

"Show me." She picked up a bucket. "Go to the house where that smoke is coming from, and throw snow on any fire you see."

She shoved the bucket into his chest and his big burly arms grabbed it by reflex. "Glad you accept," she said, then went back to her observatory. Before crawling into bed, she checked outside to see if the smoke had dissipated. It had. She tumbled into bed and went to sleep.