

Princess Tyler and the Farm Game

Chapter 1: The Mean Bird

Once upon a time, Princess Tyler was playing by the big tree behind her castle. There was a jungle gym set there and she liked to swing and mess around on it. She was bored though, and her birthday was coming up.

She was day dreaming about what kind of things would happen on her birthday when she heard a lot of strange noises in the tree. There was a big black bird up on a branch squawking and hopping up and down. This was one angry bird, Tyler thought. I wonder what is the matter?

Then at the bottom of the tree, Fred the squirrel poked his head out of a hole laughing and laughing. “Fred,” Tyler cried out. “What’s going on with the bird?”

“He tried to take one of my acorns away without asking permission,” Fred explained. “So I told him he was rude and not very nice and I climbed up on his back and took a feather out of his tail so I can fan myself when it gets hot. I jumped down and told him that he could have my acorn. My price for it is a feather out of his tail. Well he went nuts...sorry, I didn’t mean to make a Poppop joke... and started squawking and calling me bad names. I hope I taught him a lesson in politeness. I would have given him as many acorns as he wanted if he had just asked me.”

“That sounds fair,” Tyler said laughing. “A feather for a nut.” They both laughed.

“By the way, Tyler, George and I know it is your birthday coming up so we have a surprise for you. Be here right after school tomorrow and we’ll show you something wonderful.”

With that, Fred went back into the hole in the bottom of the big tree. Tyler looked up at the bird that was still making a lot of angry sounds. Suddenly a huge bird head poked out of the tree and yelled noises. The blackbird almost fell off the branch and flew away squawking. Tyler thought that the big bird head was making noises more like a squirrel than a bird and when Fred came out on the branch holding a toy bird that he had found in the back yard she laughed out loud.

“Fred,” Tyler called up to him, “That was really funny. I’ll bet that mean bird doesn’t try to steal any more of your acorns.”

Fred waved goodbye as Princess Tyler went back to her castle to finish her homework and have dinner. She couldn’t wait until tomorrow to find out what her animal friends had in store for her.

Chapter 2: George’s Farm

Tyler ran all the way back from school, put her books away, took out her homework and finished it quickly. Then she went out by the big tree and waited. When Fred and George didn’t show up, she began to worry. She went over to the big tree and whacked it with a baseball bat three times. That was always her signal for Fred to come and visit her. Fred didn’t come out of the hole.

“Oh, no!” she said out loud. “Maybe they won’t come. Maybe something happened to them!”

Just then she heard something unusual, a lot of sounds all at once and George, her duck friend, landed with a thud at the base of the tree. Fred fell off his back and....and....so did the biggest snake she had ever seen. George had flown to the big tree from the Duck Pond with her squirrel and....a new friend? There were quacking sounds, chipper sounds which she recognized as laughing and a new one, loud hissing sounds, which she did not recognize at all.

Tyler was not fond of snakes. But George waddled over to her with his wings around Fred and the huge snake that slithered with them and said, “Tyler, let me introduce you to one of my new friends I found at my farm.”

“Your farm,” Tyler asked?

“We’ll talk about your surprise birthday present later. First I want you to meet *Noma*. It is an African name and it means ‘farming’ and that’s how I met her. Remember that my name means ‘farmer.’ I would marry her, but a snake wife and a duck husband probably wouldn’t work.” Even Tyler laughed at that.

The huge snake opened an enormous mouth. She was fifteen feet long. Tyler looked at the teeth and started to back away. George said, “No, no Tyler. Don’t be alarmed. She is a beautiful seven year old girl snake. Her birthday is

the same as yours, March 19. She says her astrological sign is 'Pisces', the fish. She is a bi-colored python rock snake, a water snake, so that makes a lot of sense. I made friends with her on my farm."

Tyler stopped and listened. Sure enough Noma's hissing started to make sense.

"Ssssoo, hi, Tyler," said the huge snake. "George told me that you have the ssssame birthday assss me sssso I wanted to meet you."

Fred spoke up. "Tyler, Noma comes from a very famous snake family in Africa. Her great, great, great grandmother was the one that helped the elephant child have a long trunk down on the African great, grey, green, greasy Limpopo River in Zimbabwe. Her grandmother pulled the little elephant baby back from the crocodile that had bitten his short snout, as all elephants had in those days. The elephant child had been tricked by the mean croc. Grandmother Python wrapped herself around the elephant child's hind legs and around a tree and pulled, and pulled back and the crocodile pulled on the little baby elephant's short nose. It got longer and longer until finally the croc had to let go. After that, elephants all had long noses. Noma's grandmother was a heroine to the elephant tribe."

"Wow," Tyler said. "That's quite a story. I'm pleased to meet you, Noma."

"Ssssame here, Tyler," Noma hissed. "Happy sssspecial birthday, Tyler."

George interrupted the conversation to say, "We need to get going for your birthday present, Tyler. Hop on."

Fred and Tyler got on and then Noma got on and wrapped her long, long snake body around them so they wouldn't fall off. George took a long running start and began to fly.

"Next stop, my farm," George quacked back at his passengers. It sounded like this:

"Quaaaaackxst squaackp quamck farquaaaaackm." But they all understood what he was saying.

"letsssssst go," Noma hissed.

Fred spoke perfect English, but like the chipmunks in a high voice. “Lets go,” he said in his high squirrel voice.

Chapter 3: The Jungle and Scary Creatures

They flew over Princess Tyler’s castle, over the Tappan Zee Bridge and down the Hudson River in New Jersey until they came to the Meadow Lands and finally to a swamp with a dense jungle. George landed gracefully in a small grass place between the trees. It looked very dark in the jungle. Tyler wasn’t sure she wanted to go in there.

“Come on,” George said. Let’s go see my farm. Remember how we talked about playing “farm” when you went to Duck School? Well, Fred is now the ruler, like his name. Remember?” And George put a tiny crown on Fred’s little head and a pretty blue cape on Fred’s tiny, furry body and a wee little scepter in his paw. Fred had a huge smile on his squirrel mouth, his teeth all white and shiny.

“And we have a surprise thing for you to do, Tyler. Wait and see.”

They all went into the dark forest. It was damp and cool and yucky. Tyler looked around to see if there were any dangerous animals, but it was too dark to see. Noma slithered up to Tyler and said, “Thisssss issss a wonderful place, Tyler. It isssssn’t dangeroussss. Put your arm around my sssssshoulder and I’ll lead you.” “Oopssss,” she hissed. “I forgot. I don’t have sssssshoulderssss.” Tyler laughed and put her arm around Noma’s scaly neck. She was surprised to find out that it wasn’t slimy at all. Noma’s scales were dry and soft and felt nice.

“Thanks, Noma,” Tyler said. “Now I feel safe. Nobody would mess with you. You’re so big and boy, with all those teeth.....” Noma laughed, but it sounded like air coming out of a tire. “ssss-ssss-ssss” was what her laughter sounded like.

Tyler could see a place with some sun and beautiful, tall trees. “This is my farm,” George said.

She walked, Noma slithered, Fred hopped and George waddled with his big webbed feet into a large place covered with trees like an umbrella over a wonderful house. It was what the Irish people called a ‘glen.’ Flowers were

everywhere. Bees and hummingbirds were all over buzzing and fluttering. Someone must have told the mean blackbird that something important was happening, because he came down to the ground and squawked and chirped to Fred. Tyler couldn't understand what they were talking about because they kept talking animal and bird talk, but she knew it was all right. Fred climbed up on the bird's back and the two of them rode around for awhile, Fred waving his scepter and the blackbird squawking happily.

Noma, Tyler and George came up to the house. It looked like a barn, the kind of barn you would find on a farm.

“This farmhouse needs some work, Tyler. My monkey friends helped me build it and my rabbit friends helped plant the garden. But it needs a woman's touch. Come on in, you guys and see what we need to do.”

George opened the big barn doors. Just as they were entering the barn, a huge, ugly, spider with hair and fangs and slobber and a mean look blocked their way sitting in the middle of a big spider web. The spider swung back on a long, silky spider strand and swung towards Tyler with all six hairy legs and big, slimy teeth. Tyler let out a big yell as the spider landed on her head.

Chapter 4: Mabel and Tiling with Tyler

Tyler thought she was going to faint. Spiders were not among her favorite animals and this was a really big one. Mrs. Loveless had explained to her at school that spiders were wonderful creatures, She knew that they weren't insects at all, but were called “arachnids.” Mrs. Loveless said they had a different kind of name because they had eight legs instead of six like insects. Tyler closed her eyes. This was not a good thing. Goodbye, cruel world, she thought.

But what she felt was soft and furry on her face. The big spider landed on Tyler's shoulders and sat there massaging her face with four of her spider legs. Tyler heard the spider speak and opened her eyes. All her friends were laughing.

“Surprise!” they all shouted in their animal voices. The spider, sitting on her head now, said, “Hi, Tyler. My name is Mabel and I am a Pisces.” Everybody howled with laughter at that because everyone knew that Mabel hated water and fish made her sick to her stomach.

Mabel hopped down from Tyler and said in perfect English, “Oime goin’ to ‘elp you toile, Toyler.” George explained that Mabel was an English spider and talked with a Cockney accent. “Cockney’s are really cool English working people,” George told her. They have a special English way of speaking so it sounds strange.”

Noma translated.

“Mabel sssssayssss sssshe will help you tile,” Noma hissed.

Tyler couldn’t figure out what was going on. George explained. “Remember how you name means someone that tiles? Well the insides of this barn are very plain. I hoped that you would tile it in pretty colors so that the animals that come to my farm will feel that their home is warm and pretty.

Tyler looked over at an enormous mound of tiles, yellow, orange, red, light green, black, light blue, pink and purple...all kinds of colors. She looked at Fred sitting on the back of the blackbird. “Fred,” she said, “I mean King Fred.” They all laughed, Fred most of all. “King Fred, I just can’t do it all. I don’t know how to tile. And there are too many.”

“Ah hah!” King Fred yelled in his high squeaky voice. “That’s what Mabel is for. She is an expert tiler. Look at her web...how clean and lovely her designs are. And don’t forget that she has eight legs so she can tile like nobody’s business.”

Everybody thought that was pretty funny too except Mabel. She took tiling and legs seriously.

“Ok, you guys. You go out and plant with the rabbits or paint the outside of the barn or something. Tyler and I have stuff to do.”

George and Fred and Noma left the barn laughing their butts off and slapping each other on various parts of their upper bodies that people would call ‘backs’ and closed the barn doors.

Chapter 5: Tyler is Tiling

Tyler looked at Mabel and said, “Mabel, I don’t know anything about doing tiles. Can you teach me?”

Mabel sat down. She rubbed all eight of her legs together. She was all hot to trot to get this project going.

“Ok, here’s the deal,” Mabel said. “You spread all this gook on the wall, then starting from the bottom, put the tiles carefully on each other and I’ll show you the rest.”

It must have been pretty amusing to see Mabel show Tyler how to do it. With eight legs she did an entire wall in eight minutes. Tyler was very impressed. She decided that spiders were terrific creatures.

“Wow, Mabel. You really are an expert. I see that you can use the hairs on your legs to spread the sticky stuff. I don’t have any hair on my arms, so what do I do?”

“Easy,” Mabel explained waving two or three legs around for emphasis. She gave Tyler a trowel, a metal thing with a handle. “You put the sticky goop on the trowel, spread it around an area on the wall, and put the tiles on. The goop holds them together. Easy.”

Tyler and Mabel worked for a long time putting the tiles on the walls. It was more complicated than she said. You had to put small plastic things between the tiles, called ‘spacers’, to make sure they were even. When Tyler had put all the tiles in place, she asked her new friend Mabel, “How do I get tiles up high, over my head?”

“Easy,” Mabel said again, waving all her legs. She put two of them up to her mouth and whistled loudly. After a minute, George came in. “Climb aboard, Tyler. I can get you up to places you can’t reach with help from Noma. Fred, you need to direct traffic.”

This must have looked pretty complicated. Noma crawled up the wall and hung from one of the ceiling beams under the roof of the barn. George flew up to the last place Tyler had put tiles and flapped his wings so that they were standing still in the air while Noma lowered herself from the ceiling until she was even with Tyler.

“Now get on my neck, Tyler,” Noma said. Tyler carefully slid over, got on Noma’s long, long, long, loooooooooooooooooong neck. “Now you can stand up, Tyler and you won’t worry about falling off.” Noma stretched her neck wide

to make a platform for Tyler to stand on. Snakes, Tyler thought, are very flexible and clever.

Mabel shouted orders to everyone in Cockney slang and of course Fred was shouting orders in his high voice and George was quacking up a storm. Noma finally said, “Sssssssstop!”

Everyone stopped. Any snake that big demanded attention. “We’re not working like a team. Mabel, you are the tiler. You give us directions.”

Mabel said, “Tyler and I are going to tile the last wall. George, you go get some soft drinks. King Fred, you just stay where you are and look kingly. We’ll be done in twenty minutes.” By now everyone could understand Mabel’s Cockney accent.

George flew out of the barn. Fred looked very kingly. Tyler and Mabel got down to business and tiled the rest of the wall. By now Tyler was an experienced tiler, so the work went fast. Mabel was Tyler’s elevator. When there was a new row of tiles to do, Mabel would rise a little like a platform. Mabel had sticky stuff on her legs so she could climb the wall by herself.

Tyler called over to Mabel while she put in a new tile, “Boy I sure wish I could climb walls like you, Mabel.”

In no time the wall was finished. George came flying in with soft drinks. Rabbits and monkeys came after him. The barn was filled with creatures. Tyler thought to herself, I guess I’m a creature too. How odd.

Noma lowered Tyler down to the floor and untied herself from the rafter, slithered down and raised herself like a cobra to look at the work. Everyone stopped talking. It was very quiet. They all looked at the wall that Mabel and Tyler had just finished. They started to ooooooh and aaaaaah.

The tiles made a picture. Mabel stood up on her two hind legs and clapped. Of course, furry spider legs clapping don’t make much noise, but everyone started clapping too. Tyler looked in amazement.

There, on the wall, was a giant picture of an eight year old Tyler doing gymnastics. She was on a balance beam doing a back hand spring. She was wearing a pink leotard and pink slippers.

Fred spoke up. “I overheard your mommy say that you were good at gymnastics so we asked Mabel to design this mural of you in our imagination.”

At first, Tyler couldn’t say anything. She was speechless. Then she turned to Mabel and gave her a big hug. Mabel hugged back with all eight legs, which was quite a hug. Everybody started to sing Happy Birthday. Tyler got all teary-eyed. When the song was over Tyler started to talk.

“You guys are such good friends. Thank you for everything. This was a great birthday present. I’m going to write your Duck School teacher, George and thank her too. Fred, thanks for being so kindly and arranging everything. Noma, I will always love snakes from now on. And Mabel, you are my new special friend.”

Mabel blushed. It is not clear from the science books what color spiders turn when they blush, but Mabel turned bright pink, Tyler’s favorite color.

George said, “Climb on, Tyler and Fred. We’ve got to get you back in time for supper. Maybe next time we can have a gymnastics tournament and we all can do our tricks.” Tyler thought that was a great idea as she got on George’s back and helped Fred up.

Everyone clapped as George flew away through the barn door...except for Noma. Snakes don’t clap very well. She hissed as they left, “Sssssso long, Tyler. Have a sssssspecial birthday.” Tyler waved back.

On the way to her castle in Scarsdale, Tyler thought about the day. She had new friends, Noma the enormous snake and Mabel the huge spider. Before today she was afraid of snakes and spiders. She decided to learn a lot more about these wonderful creatures.

And she remembered her own thought: I’m a creature too. She smiled as she saw her castle in the distance.