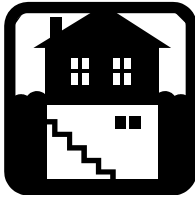


The Grungy Cellar  
Written by Donna Mann



One Saturday morning when Grammie was quilting in the upstairs bedroom and Poppa was in the driving shed fixing his tractor, Geordie thought he'd go down to the cellar. At the very moment when he decided to explore, Kitty stepped on his foot, twisting and turning, rubbing against his leg and purring very loudly. Geordie thought she was trying to agree and so he reached for the knob, turned it and then pulled the door towards him.

“You want to go with me, Kitty?” She snuggled up against him, then looked up as if to say, “Well, let's get to it.” She jumped down on the first step to view the cellar from her balcony position. Geordie smiled.

Geordie loved Kitty and looked forward to spending time with her every time he came to visit Grammie and Poppa. Even though Grammie had told Geordie that he was tall for his age and looked older than eight, he was sure that Kitty just thought of him as a good friend.

Kitty had been with him on his other adventures in the old farmhouse and was always a willing partner to investigate different rooms. Geordie knew that the off limits attic was no longer a big secret. There was still some mystery, odd noises and sounds with some magical twists and turns. Geordie knew he would never figure everything out about it, but at least now his curiosity had lessened. He was thrilled in solving . . . well a few things.

It hadn't taken long for Geordie to understand about the long metal shaft in the upstairs bedroom wall. Poppa said it'd been a chimney, but now it was replaced because of the new furnace. Geordie laughed and thought it'd make a dandy dirty clothes shoot.

And then there was the door that wasn't a door. Well it looked like a door, but it didn't go anywhere because it didn't open. That was dumb. Geordie guessed it was an easy way to fill a hole in the wall left from past years.

The back staircase had puzzled him for a long time because it had such narrow steps and Geordie thought that only fairies and gremlins would ever use it. But Grammie solved that mystery by saying when they were built, people had very small feet. Well, good reason to have small steps and Geordie always chuckled when he had to come down sideways because of his big feet.

Now, standing at the top of the stairs, he faced this weird space ahead of him – the cellar. He had asked Poppa about it, who had said that it's only a grungy old cellar and that Geordie wouldn't want to go down there. But, Geordie wondered how he would know that, because Geordie hadn't said it. Maybe, Poppa was just guessing. Because if the truth was known, Geordie definitely wanted to go down and see what was there. But, still something bothered him and he had to admit he was a little afraid of what he might find, especially when Poppa said, Geordie *wouldn't want to go*. He must know something that Geordie didn't know.

Kitty meowed as if to say that Geordie had hesitated long enough and that it was time to move. Geordie took a step down beside Kitty. A smell of wet earth and rotten . . . something awful

seemed to surround him. What was that smell? It filled his nose, making him sneeze and choke and cough. “Ah did he really want to go further?”

As if Kitty knew what he was thinking, she jumped down a couple more steps to coax Geordie along. Geordie slowly followed, yet afraid there might be all kinds of mysterious creatures down there. What if there were animals or . . . or worse still, a ghost. No, Geordie decided they couldn't stand that awful smell long enough to live down there very long. But Geordie reasoned what if they just got used to it and even grew bigger and uglier and madder because of it?

At that thought he looked up towards the door that led to the main house and watched it slowly slide shut - its click making an echoing sound of locking. He was just about ready to run back up the stairs when he heard a soft twilling echo. It was a happy sound, almost like singing or whistling. Geordie wondered if Poppa had come in through another door and would be waiting for him. Should he go on down the stairs? Yes, that's what he would do. He'd go and find Poppa.

The light from a small window shed a dim greyness through the cellar. It was only then that Geordie realized he hadn't turned the lights on. Well, this light would do for now. Maybe there were things he didn't want to see anyway. They would only scare him more.

The whistling continued and Geordie was quite certain that Poppa would probably just appear around the corner at any time. Kitty sat on the bottom step watching Geordie as if she wasn't sure what he was going to do next.

Farwhummm! All at once a thundering noise filled the cellar and Geordie froze. He opened his eyes wide with fear. His pulse raced and his throat seemed to fill up to keep him from breathing. He wondered if he'd caused that noise when he placed his foot on the bottom step, but he was too afraid to lift his foot. What if there was an underground space station down here that brought aliens in from outer space? And maybe Poppa was a partner with them. What if his whistling was a signal for them to enter? Maybe they would capture him . . . and Kitty.

The noise, although now had decreased to a rushing, puffing and pushing sound almost like wind, made Geordie feel like a great hand was going to reach out from the shadows to pick him and Kitty up and carry them away. “I'm outa here,” he shouted into the space. Just as quickly as he thought it, he did it. Immediately Geordie turned, took a great leap and climbed the steps, two at a time toward the door at the top of the stairs. Kitty ran past him as if saying, “If you're going, I am too.”

Geordie looked around to see if anybody had seen his grand entry into the kitchen or maybe it was his grand exit from the cellar. Geordie didn't know which. But no one was around. Grammie was still upstairs quilting and Poppa was still out in the driving shed trying to get his tractor started . . . or was he?

Geordie never told Poppa about going to the cellar as he'd said that Geordie wouldn't want to go down there. Even though Geordie had already made up his mind that he wasn't going to like the cellar, he couldn't really agree that he didn't want to go down there – again. But, he did agree that it was a grungy cellar, just like Poppa said.

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The next morning Geordie got up late. As soon as he came into the kitchen Kitty meowed. "Looking for your milk?" Geordie asked her. He finished his breakfast, gave Kitty her treat and tidied up the dishes. He didn't know where Poppa was, but if he hadn't got his tractor fixed yesterday, he'd be sure to be out in the driving shed tinkering with it. Grammie would probably be sewing so Geordie decided not to bother either one of them. Besides, he had some unfinished business. Looking toward the cellar door, he asked Kitty if she wanted to go down there again. Kitty ran over to the door as if she was ready anytime that Geordie was.

Geordie opened the door and this time, he turned on the light so he could see everything when he was done there. Kitty jumped down from one step to another, giving Geordie the impression that she knew exactly where she was going. Standing on the second step, Geordie decided that he would go down and regardless of the smell or the noises, he'd do what he wanted to do and that was to explore.

He moved down each step slowly until he reached the cement floor. Kitty ran ahead to the middle of the room and then began to snoop around the old pieces of furniture, smelling the half-dead plants and playing with the Christmas decorations that dangled out of their boxes. She jumped like a hungry lion looking for his dinner, on top of what looked like cases of books and dishes, and then climbed around as if there was a mouse hiding in there, waiting just for her. After leaping to the floor to sit between the legs of a big wooden chair, she looked up at Geordie and meowed. Geordie replied, "You've been in this grungy cellar before Kitty, that's why you're so much at home."

Geordie shifted his position and gave a sigh of relief. "Maybe this isn't going to be half as scary as I thought it might be," he said to Kitty. Then he heard the twittering sound again, almost like a whistle but not quite. *Oh that Poppa, letting us all believe he's out working on his tractor and he's down here all the time, waiting to play.* Geordie frowned. But, what was he doing? And why doesn't he come out instead of hiding? Geordie remembered yesterday when he thought Poppa had made that awful windy noise or wondered if he was maybe sending signals to aliens. Geordie wasn't sure about that anymore, but he wasn't going to think about that now. It would have to wait.

He walked along the length of the room to a doorway that led into the back part of the cellar. This room paled in comparison to the light in the big room, but Geordie could see the water tanks, furnace, freezer and electrical panel. The kitty-litter box in the corner smelled nice and fresh, but a pile of old onions just plain stunk. Whew! That's peuky stuff. Geordie shrugged and said to Kitty, "I guess we're not going to find treasures in here, Kitty." She ignored him and ran over to the corner as if she'd just caught sight of a mouse.

Just as quickly as she ran, she stopped abruptly and turned to look at Geordie. What sounded like a great gush of water roared all around him. He put his hands on his ears and thought he must be in a huge pipe under the ocean as the space filled with sounds of a great flood. He looked around. Yes, he was in the cellar, but the vibrating or swilling sound of water told him that he'd better hang on to something or he'd be washed away to some unknown place.

Geordie quickly turned around to go back toward the steps, but in his haste he must have run in the wrong direction, as he bumped into a man. Relief filled him. This must be Poppa as no one else would be in the cellar. It smelled like Poppa and his tractor. So, Geordie had no need to be afraid. But, as he put his arms around Poppa, the clothes crumpled against him. Geordie tried to scream, but no sound came. He thrashed his arms to free himself and then he realized it was Poppa's coveralls hanging from one of the old beams. The roar of the water had slowed down to a swishing sound now and Geordie began to relax. He was proud of himself that he hadn't run scared. He didn't understand all these noises, but in spite of everything that had happened, he did think the cellar was kind of fun.

He walked a little further along the wall to explore a small room at the end. He couldn't see very well in this space as there didn't seem to be a light bulb or switch. He noticed shelves with many different dishes and cooking utensils. "Grammie better have a yard sale. She's got a lot of junk." Kitty jumped up on a box and began to scratch at a lid. "You like to explore too," Geordie said to Kitty, as he opened a paper container to see inside.

A shuffling noise from above and then the sound of a soft click sounded like thunder. Suddenly, it was total blackness in the room. Geordie couldn't see anything. How did that happen? Maybe Kitty tripped some switch as she scampered around, but no, she's not heavy enough to do any damage. Or maybe those aliens were attacking and Poppa had an automatic defence system to cause a blackout, so we wouldn't be able to see until they got in. But then, Geordie wondered if he'd caused some kind of short in the electrical system by coming into this room. Maybe it was a signal for some great arch to open in the wall showing a way out. Of course, that's it. One light had to go out before another one could go on. Geordie stood in the dark and waited-but nothing happened. What now? Geordie couldn't imagine.

Geordie started to back out of the little room. Fear gripped him as he couldn't remember which way he should turn to get back to where he had started to explore. He put his hands out to feel his way, but every place he touched either felt cold and clammy or dusty and dirty. Yuck! How would he get out if he couldn't use his hands to guide him? He wished he had paid more attention to what was along the shelves and wall when he came this way. It was like going in circles, which Geordie was sure was exactly what he must be doing.

Tripping over pails and plastic cans, he lost his balance and fell. Dusting himself off, he stood up and began to move slowly, putting one foot out at a time to be sure there was open space ahead for him to walk. His eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness but he couldn't see anything that looked like a doorway into the big room. Then he thought of Kitty. Geordie remembered Grammie telling him that cats can see in the dark.

"Come here, Kitty. Where are you?" Geordie asked, squinting in the darkness, trying to see her. Suddenly a long narrow ridge of fur pushed against Geordie and he heard Kitty purring. "Oh, there you are Kitty. I'm so glad you found me in this mess. So you really can see in the dark." He petted her and talked to her for a while and then said, "Wherever you go, I'm following. Just don't go chasing any mice."

It wasn't long before Kitty began to walk away from Geordie and he followed. They walked for a few feet, Kitty leading the way and Geordie bent over with one hand around Kitty's tail. They moved along for another few feet and Geordie was sure, they'd be coming to the staircase soon.

Then the room flooded with light and Geordie saw Poppa standing at the top of the stairs. Geordie looked at him from his bent position, very relieved to see him.

"Why are you and Kitty playing in the dark?" Poppa asked.

Geordie hadn't thought of it as *playing*, but he was glad Kitty had led the way back to the stairs. He wasn't going to tell Poppa about the underground flood or the black-out.

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Geordie lay in his bed as the morning sun spread across his quilt. His teddy bears, all lined up against the wall, smiled over at him as if to say, "And what are you going to do today, Geordie?" He sighed and said, "I'm going to ask Grammie if we can clean up the grungy cellar."

Just then Kitty pranced into Geordie's room meowing as if to announce breakfast. He reached out and petted her. "Are you ready to do something, Kitty?" Geordie laughed. He swung his legs over the side of the bed, stood up and stretched. Changing into his favourite jeans, he thought about how he was going to talk Grammie into leaving her quilting to work in the cellar. He finished dressing, washed and ran down the steps to the kitchen. Poppa and Grammie were sitting at the table.

"You're up early this morning, Geordie," Grammie said. "Something special you want to do today?"

"Well, yes, I mean . . . I would like to . . . well, would you like to clean up the cellar – I mean with me?" Geordie could see by her expression that this was not something she wanted to do.

"Clean the cellar? Our cellar?" she asked.

"That grungy cellar down there?" Poppa said and pointed to the cellar door.

"Yes, I . . . I've been down there," Geordie said and then hurried on before either one of them could say something. "I know you didn't think I wanted to go down there, but I did. I mean I do. And I still do. I think it's a pretty neat place - even if it does smell sometimes." He looked down at his plate. "There are so many strange things that happen down there, too, but I'll figure them out in time."

"There are?" Grammie asked. "Have we missed something in this old house?" She looked at Poppa.

"I think we should fix up an area for me to play in," Geordie said.

"For you to play in?" Poppa said. "But you have the whole house to play in."

“Well, it’s not really mine,” Geordie said.

“Oh, I don’t know. With your imagination, the first thing we know you’ll have aliens, underground tunnels, and all kinds of imaginary friends down there with you.”

“I will? Oh, wouldn’t that be fun?” Geordie got so excited. “So does that mean you’ll help me?”

Poppa looked at Grammie and laughed. “I guess it wouldn’t hurt none.”

“Can we start on it today?” Geordie asked.

“I guess we could. I got the tractor running now, so I don’t have anything pressing to do,” Poppa said.

“But, I do,” said Grammie. “I have to have that side of the quilt done by the end of next week.”

“Oh, a day isn’t going to hold you back that much, is it?” Poppa asked. “Who knows what we’ll find down there.”

“Or who we’ll find, eh Geordie.” Grammie tousled Geordie’s hair.

They cleared up the dishes and both Grammie and Poppa put on big aprons and they all went downstairs. This time Kitty sat at the top of the stairs and watched. Geordie thought she must have known that she would get in the way, but then she could see much better from up there.

Over the next three hours, Poppa carried a lot of boxes out to the driving shed or the garbage and Grammie had tucked more things back in that small room that Geordie thought she might be saving for the yard sale. The new space soon looked clean. Poppa said that tomorrow he’d white-wash the walls and he had an old rug stored above the beams in the driving shed that he’d bring in to put down on the floor. Geordie was almost jumping for joy. He could hardly wait until he had his own space in the old house – even if he had to share it with aliens, weird creatures, an underground tunnel and more secret rooms. They just tempted him to think about further explorations.

By Friday of that same week, Geordie had his own space with white walls and a warm rug. Poppa had put a white board on the wall and Geordie had lots of coloured crayons. He had all his trucks parked along one wall and his barn set up on the other, while his teddy bears looked down from a table top. Geordie hadn’t decided if he liked some girl things that appeared in the room, like a buggy and table with chairs, along with a little cook stove, but he decided it was all right to share his space with his girl cousins.

Poppa and Grammie came down to see if he was happy with the space. Geordie assured them that it was just perfect.

“Well, we can’t call it a grungy old cellar, anymore,” Poppa said.

“Not all of it,” Grammie said. “The rest of it still needs a good cleaning.”

Just then the whistle started, a singing-like sound filled the room. Its gentle rhythm was like a welcome to the new space. Geordie had heard it many times and had grown accustomed to it. At first he thought it was Poppa, but now he was sure it wasn't as Poppa was standing right in front of him. Hmm. What was it, then?

Geordie noticed movement under the steps and smiled. A small little cricket jumped around as if he was as excited as everybody else for Geordie to have a special place in the once-grungy cellar.

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

We're so glad you listened to The Grungy Cellar. It's a fun story isn't it? And I think Geordie was very brave. He wanted to explore a place in the old farmhouse, even though Poppa thought he 'wouldn't want to do it.' Geordie stuck with his plan and even though he was surprised many times by things he didn't understand, he still wanted to explore. He knew that Grammie and Poppa were very close should he need them.

Have you ever wanted to do something very much, but things happen that make you wonder if you really should continue? For example, remember when Geordie heard the *Ferorummm* sound, he was scared, but that didn't stop him. And guess what, he had actually heard that sound many times in other parts of the house. It just sounded different in the grungy cellar. Can you guess what made that sound?

There were other unexplained sounds, movements and objects that all made sense to Geordie when he finally understood what caused them. Can you guess what made the swilling, swishing sound? What caused the blackout?

In time, Geordie claimed a corner of the cellar for his own and even managed to persuade Poppa and Grammie to help with the job of cleaning it. Weren't you glad Geordie convinced his grandparents to prepare a play area for him? He has a safe place to play with all his little friends. Where's your favourite place to play?

Character traits: Trust; perseverance; goal setting; persuasion; courage

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