

Excerpted from *The Fairy Chronicles: Volume IV*

The Adventures of Red Zipper

Imagine the secret lives of pets, especially the pets of magical beings such as fairies and brownies. What are they up to when no one is looking, and why are they often nowhere to be found? Perhaps they are magical themselves and use their spare time to help save the world from evil forces. Red Zipper, a blue heeler dog, and his friends definitely lead secret lives. In this set of adventures, they assist a gargoyle to ward off evil spirits, recover a stolen lime tree for a tiny magician, help the fairies rid a home of a nasty gnarlbeast, and save the Sandman from a bewitched sandcastle. However, these important missions and rescue efforts are not the most difficult part of our furry superheroes' lives because coexisting with the cats in the area presents even more of a difficult challenge.



To Krishna

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Chapter One

Dogs, Cats, and Cathedrals

Two summers ago, Red Zipper was adopted during a series of rather curious events. Monet Lessinger, a local fern fairy, who didn't actually know she was a fairy at the time, was trying to find good homes for her neighbor's litter of blue heeler puppies. She was nine years old that summer. Unfortunately, due to her personality, and the way her brain patterns tended to work, Monet frequently forgot things, or simply got confused and couldn't remember details correctly. With her good intentions, she rushed right out to help find the dogs good homes. She ended up spreading the word that Mr. and Mrs. Walters had *red zipper* puppies available for adoption, instead of blue heelers.

It just so happened that Brian and Dennis Simmons, two brownie brothers, had just been given permission to adopt a dog. This perfect timing, and Fern's perfect mix-up, ended up giving Red Zipper the perfect home. Brian and Dennis were so curious about what a red zipper dog might look like that they had already made up their minds to adopt one before even arriving at the Walters' house.

Upon finding out the mistake, it didn't matter. Blue heelers were just as desirable as red zippers as far as the boys were concerned, and the smallish size was within the acceptable range set by their parents.

Choosing which of the six pups to adopt was not difficult at all because Red Zipper, the runt of the litter, actually chose Brian and Dennis. As soon as they entered the house, Zip immediately jumped from the puppy basket to greet them. He yipped loudly and gave the boys sloppy wet kisses on their ankles, in an effort to tell them he really needed to go home with them. Then he dashed across the room to zigzag several times between the legs of the dining room table and chairs to show off a bit.

“Well, he is reddish and he’s definitely zipping around,” said Dennis. “No wonder Monet got confused.”

Brian was nodding. “Look how fast he is. Red Zipper is the perfect name for him.” So Zip was adopted, named, and went home with his new humans the same day.

Brian and Dennis were themselves adopted. This was special because most brownies were orphans, but not very many of them got adopted. Unlike Fern at a very young age, Brian and Dennis did know that they were brownies, having lived at the brownie orphanage until they were ages four and five when Mr. and Mrs. Simmons adopted them. Their parents, of course, did not know that the boys were brownies. It wasn’t just that harboring magical spirits had to be kept secret; it had more to do with the fact that not many people would choose to adopt boys full of such mischief. However, currently at ages eleven and twelve, Brian and Dennis had managed to outgrow a good bit of their tomfoolery.

Brian’s brownie spirit came from Spanish moss. In addition to the traditional tan clothing worn by most brownies, he wore a cap covered with feathery gray moss over his dark hair. Dennis was a mineral brownie whose spirit came from cryolite. He also had dark hair and wore a string of reddish-white cryolite crystals around his neck.

The boys’ magical gifts were much the same as all boy fairies and included the ability to change into brownie form, along with enhanced communication skills with birds, animals, insects, reptiles, and such like. When brownies were in brownie form, they had the same protection gift as fairies, and could only be seen as their brownie spirits to non-magical people. However, brownies had the additional gift of excellent camouflage abilities. They could blend into their backgrounds in nearly every setting, and their skills often allowed them to hide from even the cleverest of other magical creatures and animals.

The pets of fairies and brownies were often slightly magical themselves; but, then, all pets could be considered somewhat magical.

Red Zipper most often did not accompany Dennis and Brian on their brownie adventures. For one thing, brownie resizing didn't usually work on living creatures such as animals and birds. That's also why the pets of fairies seldom accompanied them on their missions. But it didn't matter because Zip had plenty of magical adventures of his own. In fact, he led somewhat of a secret life and was something of a superhero dog because he ended up helping a lot of people with his efforts. Zip felt proud of his achievements because he really admired hero dogs. His favorite movies were those featuring Benji, Lassie, and Balto.

Zip even had a few secret powers, which is why he could be considered similar to a superhero dog. Even though he was small, he was super fast. That was probably his main power. Also, he only splashed a little bit when having a bath, which took some doing. As another one of his powers, Zip could curl into a ball and roll, in order to knock into things, sort of like a bowling ball knocking down pins.

When Zip thought about his superhero powers, he decided that his magical gifts had something to do with a kind of tingling in his ears that he felt when something important was about to happen. But maybe some of his superhero skills had to do with the speed at which he was able to wag his tail. He really couldn't be sure about this.

Zip also thought that some of his belongings might have a little something to do with his abilities. Perhaps his water dish was somewhat magical because after he took a drink of water, he could somehow run even faster. And chewing on his ratty old knotted-up sock certainly made his teeth nice and strong. So maybe the sock was a little bit magical. Zip's dark blue collar, stamped with a bright red heart, was also important to him, and he thought it might hold some secret power. He certainly liked wearing his collar because it was pretty and made him feel important.

Zip finally decided that it was just pretty hard to tell what was and wasn't magical in his life. However, he did know that he was often called upon to do important things,

including save his humans and other creatures of the world from many destructive forces.

On this particular summer afternoon, there were no noticeable destructive forces to save the world from in Red Zipper's little corner of the world. So, instead of embarking on any adventures, Zip was spending his time playing in a pile of grass clippings. Back and forth, he tore through the clippings, scattering them everywhere, and making a pretty big mess of the formerly neat pile. What an accomplishment! And so much fun! It really only took about ten minutes to make the gigantic mess, which would give Brian and Dennis something to do later. It was good for them to keep busy cleaning things up.

As Zip sneezed twice, from the bits of grass in his nose, he thought about his happy life. He was glad he got adopted, and he loved living with the brownies, especially because the boys had so many fairy friends.

Dennis and Brian also had a guinea pig named Moe who was currently on the front porch, watching the grass-clipping-pile demolition. Zip got along pretty well with Moe, who had no special powers and was not at all magical. But he was an okay guinea pig anyway. Moe's nose twitched as he sat quietly on the porch, watching Zip run about. This made Zip think about something he had heard on the radio once that had to do with staying on the porch. The radio announcer had recited a fairly well-known saying. *“If you can't run with the big dogs, then stay on the porch.”* Zip hadn't known what those words meant until just now. Moe really couldn't run like any dogs, no matter what size, so he should just stay on the porch. That was the best place for a guinea pig, when out of doors, anyway.

Zip couldn't tear through the grass clippings much longer this afternoon because he was scheduled to attend a meeting with some of his dog friends. They were planning to meet with a few of the local cats to talk about dividing up territories, so that the cats and dogs wouldn't get in each other's way so much.

The get-together was set to take place in the vacant lot directly behind Zip's house. This was a good spot to meet because there were usually no people around. Zip sometimes had his friends over to the vacant lot for doggie tea parties, which were often important planning sessions involving keeping their neighborhoods safe.

After having a long drink from a bucket of water near the porch steps, Zip sniffed Moe and whined a short goodbye to the guinea pig as he rounded the house to attend his meeting. Just as he most often did when setting out on his adventures, he squeezed through a loose fence board in the back yard to get to the lot.

Many of his friends were already there.

Big-Wag was the first to greet Zip. He was a golden retriever who belonged to a couple of local celebrities named Prima Della and Top Strawberry. Ms. Della's niece was a brandtii bat fairy. Next to Big-Wag sat Peanut, a cinnamon-colored dachshund who belonged to a fairy named Marigold. Another dachshund named Cocoa was also at the meeting; she lived next door to Peanut. Conan, a German shepherd belonging to a dove fairy, was sharing around a box of dog biscuits. Sam, a Great Pyrenees mountain dog, was sitting between Cocoa and a mixed shepherd named Tippi.

A third dachshund named Lucky, who belonged to Mr. Forrester of Bloomsbury Boulevard, trotted in just after Zip came through the fence.

Another three dogs arrived shortly. Bishop was a fluffy, mixed-breed dog. Percy and Punkin, who lived a couple of blocks from one another, were both Pomeranians. Lucky, Cocoa, Sam, Bishop, Percy, Punkin, and Tippi all had non-magical owners.

Percy and Punkin declined Conan's offer of dog biscuit treats because they had just shared a small bowl of vanilla ice cream given to them by Punkin's owner. The ice cream had been a wonderful treat for the afternoon, especially for Punkin. She loved vanilla ice cream. But she didn't like

chocolate at all. Percy basically liked all kinds of ice cream, so he was just happy that Punkin liked to share.

While they were waiting for the cats to arrive, the dogs discussed the situation.

“It’s just too hard living with cats in the area,” growled Conan.

“They are always roaming around the streets and fields, and getting in the way,” yipped Percy.

“Right,” agreed Lucky. “But what can we really do about it? I mean, they sort of have a right to be here too, don’t they?”

“Well,” said Tippi, “we can do what we talked about last time at our meeting. We can divide up the territories so when we are out and about, we don’t cross paths as much.”

“If they keep to certain streets and fields,” added Peanut, “and if we can map out and remember a few detours to avoid cat-designated areas, we should be able to keep out of each other’s hair.”

“I brought the maps,” rumbled Sam, spreading out two crumpled city maps in front of him with his huge paws. “These are pretty old, but all of the streets of our neighborhoods are on here.”

Two maps were needed because the dogs and cats of the area lived in two separate towns very close to one another. The dividing up of the territories was probably going to take some time because they really needed to split up a widespread area covering parts of both towns and the countryside between them. Percy, Punkin, and Conan all lived in the other town, but were often able to sneak away to Zip’s house for meetings and adventures with their friends.

As the dogs were poring over the maps, and thinking about which of their streets and what parts of the countryside they might allow the cats to use for their roaming, the cats began arriving for the meeting. (The dogs hadn’t brought any treats for them.)

Honey was an Abyssinian cat, and she had beige fur with hints of gold and red. Her fur also had white speckles all

over that looked like pinpoint dots of light. Houdini was a gray mackerel tabby. Mackerel basically meant that he had fancy stripes. Honey and Houdini lived with a dandelion fairy. Pernilla, Spiderwort's calico cat, was also among the early arrivals.

Lucy and Ethel, who belonged to a fairy named Thyme, sauntered in next. Lucy was a yellow domestic cat, but she was a bit more orangey than yellow. Ethel was a large Ragdoll cat with long hair and big blue eyes. She was white with some gray shading, mostly around her ears and tail. Since Ragdoll cats were very relaxed and laid-back, Ethel immediately plopped down in front of Tippi and stretched out for a nap in the grass.

Pretty Nifty closely followed Lucy and Ethel. She was a spotted tabby belonging to a girl named Nancy, whose first response to seeing the cat brought home for her by her father was "Pretty nifty." So the name stuck.

Two boy cats arrived next. Grover was a black cat with one white paw. He belonged to two sister fairies named Dusty and Morning Glory. Brick had been adopted by Mr. Fisk. As a kitten, Brick was found as a stray in the summer on a hot tin roof of a shed in the country. Even though he was a purebred Japanese Bobtail, no one seemed to know to whom he belonged, so Mr. Fisk decided to keep him. Brick couldn't remember much about his early kitten days, and didn't particularly know where he was supposed to be at that age, so Mr. Fisk's house was just fine for a home as far as Brick was concerned.

Just as they were about to begin the discussion, a couple of newer neighborhood cats wandered in. But their names weren't particularly important to know because the dogs usually had better things to do than to remember the names of new area cats.

Nudging one of the maps with his nose, Bishop was just about to let the cats know that the dogs were prepared to start dividing up the fields and streets when Grover stepped

forward. "I'm afraid dividing up the territories is going to have to wait," he gruffly mewled.

Pretty Nifty chimed in next. "Yes. We just became aware of a big problem, so we will need to put the territory discussion on hold."

Nodding very seriously, Grover explained, "A gargoyle named Istfan at St. Mark's Cathedral is being repaired. He was accidentally hit with a wrecking ball, and the people took him off last week to be repaired. Another gargoyle, Owain, from St. Anthony's, has been covering for his friend. Unfortunately, last night, two evil spirits tried to get into St. Mark's. Owain just can't cover both cathedrals without help."

The dogs looked at one another with concern. They all knew that gargoyles had the job of warding off evil spirits trying to enter churches, cathedrals, and other such structures. This was a very important job because humans, and other types of creatures, often visited and sometimes lived in many of these buildings.

"What can we do to help?" asked Conan.

"We need to cover the alley behind St. Mark's," answered Grover. "That's the vulnerable spot, where the nasty spirits are most likely to try to sneak in again."

"Since St. Anthony's is only two blocks from St. Mark's," added Pretty Nifty, "we can run to fetch Owain if the spirits show up again tonight. Istfan is being brought back tomorrow, so we will only have to help for this one night."

"Okay," said Zip. "So we just need to decide who will stand guard in the alley. I can sneak away tonight to help."

Within the next couple of minutes, it was decided that Lucky and Conan would also be able to come. Pretty Nifty and Grover immediately volunteered as well. They especially wanted to be there because they were the ones who found out about the problem in the first place. Pretty Nifty's owner also went to church services at St. Mark's, so the

tabby was anxious for the building to remain free from evil spirits.

None of the other volunteers would particularly admit it, but they were all incredibly relieved to have Lucky on the team. Since dachshunds were famous for getting rid of gremlins, they felt Lucky was probably the best dog to drive away other nasty spirits as well.

As they were leaving, Sam told Brick and Houdini, “Spread the word to other cats that we just need to stay out of each other’s way until we can meet again to discuss dividing up the territories.”

“Right,” agreed Brick. “That sounds like a good plan for now.”

The five volunteers met in the alley behind St. Mark’s Cathedral just after dark. They didn’t need to be there earlier because most evil spirits didn’t try to work their way into buildings before nighttime.

To pass the time while they were waiting and keeping watch, Zip, Conan, and Pretty Nifty looked at a picture storybook together that they found in a box on the back steps of the cathedral. Lucky and Grover played with a long piece of tangled-up string to keep from getting bored.

Things were fine until exactly three in morning. As the dogs and cats heard the cathedral clock chime three times, two very nasty evil spirits entered the alley and made their way flittingly down the narrow brick corridor. The spirits were glowing, sickly-looking creatures resembling slimy green clouds; and where their mouths and eyes should have been, there were only sunken black hollows.

Right away, Lucky bounded forward to face the spirits. Zip and Grover quickly followed to lend support, while Conan and Pretty Nifty sped away down the opposite end of the dark alley toward St. Anthony’s to get Owain.

With a lot of barking, growling, hissing, meowing, and spitting, Zip, Lucky, and Grover managed to back the spirits into a small recess in the alley that held several trash containers belonging to the cathedral. However, a window in

the recessed area had a small crack in one of the glass panes, and the spirits immediately tried to squeeze through the crack.

Using his curl-into-a-ball-and-roll technique, Zip knocked over a pile of vegetable crates sitting next to the trash bins to distract the spirits, while Lucky jumped up as high as possible to try to nip at their dangling green heels. Grover leapt atop the tallest trash container to hiss, scratch, and spit at the ghostly creatures.

Meanwhile, Pretty Nifty and Conan had reached a spot beneath Owain's perch on one of St. Anthony's spires, and Conan quickly barked, "Two evil spirits in the alley!"

Owain was an animal-form gargoyle and looked something like a cross between a bird and a lizard. He had bulging eyes, a long tongue, bat-like wings, and a spiky tail. Though he didn't often like to move, he could move very fast if he needed to. He could also fly. With great flaps of his stone wings, he set off quickly in the cloudy darkness.

Reaching the alley behind St. Mark's took the gargoyle less than a minute, which was just in time because the evil spirits were in the process of throwing the vegetable crates and other large pieces of trash at Grover, Lucky, and Zip.

"Enough!" shouted Owain, swooping down out of the sky to land in front of the trash containers. "I gave you both a chance yesterday to be off about your business and leave this cathedral alone!" he added. Then, glaring maliciously at the intruders, the gargoyle said, "You should have taken my warning seriously because I don't believe in extra chances." With this, he took one step forward and raised his front foot, pointing a single talon at the two spirits, who were now frozen with fear at facing their worst nightmare. The two couldn't believe Owain had become aware of their presence because they had checked on his position before even approaching St. Mark's tonight. *The dratted dogs and creepy cats in the area were to blame. Those nosy, interfering nuisances!* Most evil spirits hated dogs and cats, and with

good reason—the furry human-lovers were always messing things up for them.

The gargoyle's talon emitted a single red spark that traveled to a position directly in front of the nasty ghosts' faces, where it hovered for several seconds. The spirits were transfixed by the flickering spark and couldn't move. Suddenly, the glowing ember burst into four separate sparks, which flew like tiny daggers into the hollow eye sockets of the floating ghosts. There was nothing the spirits could do against the powerful gargoyle magic. In less than three seconds, the sparks completely vaporized the evil spirits from the inside out, and all that was left floating over the trash bins was a few wisps of green vapor.

Conan and Pretty Nifty had just arrived to witness the vaporization. Owain thanked the volunteers for their help and wished them a peaceful night as he took to the air to return to his perch on St. Anthony's.

The rest of the early morning was quiet, and the dogs and cats took turns napping and watching until sunrise. Then the watchers made their way back to their homes, satisfied that the cathedral was safe. They were also happy that Istfan was set to return before another night fell, because none of them particularly wanted to have to face evil spirits again anytime soon.

Chapter Two

The Escape Artist and the Elevator

Krishna was a Shetland sheepdog, or sheltie for short. His owner was a ten-year-old girl named Becky, and they had just finished taking obedience classes together.

The classes were held in the evenings at a moving company's warehouse. Since Krishna already knew how to heel, stay, come, sit, and lie down, he had much more fun exploring the empty moving containers at the warehouse. And because he was bored by Becky's efforts to teach him stuff he already knew, Krishna quickly became the biggest clown in the class. He felt perfectly justified in clowning around because he didn't need to "learn" anything like most of the other dogs. So upon practicing for a few minutes after each skill, he liked to misbehave, just to liven things up somewhat.

However, during the final training session, he behaved absolutely perfectly, because that was the day of the test. And he knew it was a test, so he had to behave and do all of the skills just right on his human's command.

His perfect behavior shocked everyone, including Becky; and at the end of the test, he received a third-place yellow ribbon. He could have gotten first, but there was some judging bias going on. Most of the other dogs in the class agreed that no one could beat the prim-and-proper Afghan hound who placed first, no matter how good anyone else performed. No one could beat the second-place snooty little poodle either, whose snootiness was hard to understand because other poodles in town were certainly not that standoffish.

Anyway, Becky seemed perfectly satisfied with the yellow ribbon, and graduation certificate, so Krishna was happy enough too. And he was even happier when Becky threw his favorite orange squeaky ball for him for an extra ten minutes that evening after they returned home. He also got to have his favorite food, pancakes, the next morning.

Many of the area dogs were able to get out of their houses and enclosures easily enough to be off on adventures. They accomplished this in various ways such as sneaking out via unlatched screen doors, pushing aside loose fence boards, learning how to open gates, and squeezing through or under stretched fence wires. Zip usually found his way through

loose fence boards like he had for the dog-cat meeting. Big-Wag liked to sneak out using a bare spot under one of the hedges on the Strawberry Estate. And Conan most often just jumped the fence at his house.

Krishna was quite remarkable as an escape artist because he could squeeze through any place that his skull could fit through. Some of his escapes had become legends amongst the area dogs because it didn't seem to matter what his humans did to try to contain him, nothing worked. He truly could go through any opening in which his skull would fit. He accomplished this one shoulder at a time, and was able to get the rest of his body to follow because his ribs and hips were very flexible. He could even flatten himself out pancake style, to resemble a stretched-out frog, when sneaking under tight fences and gates. It didn't seem to matter how hard his owners tried to keep him inside of a fence; there was always some place his head would fit through. Once outside, Krishna would occasionally open neighborhood gates from their outside latches so that other dogs could join him on exploring adventures.

About two weeks after the St. Mark's cathedral event, Krishna was chewing on his tennis ball under the peach tree in his yard. He hadn't sneaked out anywhere lately because he wanted to let his humans think they had been successful in containing him. It was good to let them think that once in awhile, so they wouldn't watch him as closely, in case he really needed to go somewhere important.

If the need to go somewhere important did present itself, there was a nicely-stretched wire on the fence that would provide a good exit because it was just big enough for his head to fit through. The stretched wire was partly covered by a morning glory vine, which was probably why his owners hadn't noticed it yet.

Krishna was keeping this spot in mind as he thoughtfully chewed. *Maybe I'll go somewhere next week*, he thought. *It's just too sunny and hot right now. Plus, I don't want to frustrate Becky because she might put me on a lead while*

trying to find my latest escape spot. That had happened before, and Krishna didn't like having to spend time on a lead.

After having a drink from his water bucket, Krishna ran to greet two fairies and a brownie riding their bicycles by his yard on their way to the public pool for the afternoon. Tea, Snapdragon, and Scott all lived nearby. They stopped for a few minutes to throw his slobbery tennis ball for him. Krishna barked excitedly to thank them for stopping as they remounted their bicycles to head to the pool. Then he got another drink and plopped back down in the shade of the peach tree to chew and think some more.

About a mile away, in a tall building in the business district, a young boy named Austin was just entering an elevator by himself. He was going to visit his mom who worked on the top floor. Unfortunately, gremlins had recently tampered with the wiring of the elevator, and the conveyance got stuck between the sixth and seventh floors. The tampering had also broken the call button, so there was no way to call for help. Even shouting didn't work because most of the employees on the sixth and seventh floors were away for a training workshop.

Since this was a large building, with six lobby elevators, no one particularly noticed that the one elevator wasn't moving, so the lone occupant was pretty much stuck, and out of luck, for the time being. However, Austin was not just stuck, he was in trouble. He had to take medication periodically, and he didn't have any with him. This meant he was going to be in even bigger trouble in a short while. He had primarily been going to visit his mother at her office to get his new medication prescription that she had picked up on her lunch hour.

Fortunately, a cricket was in the elevator with Austin, though Austin didn't particularly notice him. And crickets were fairly smart insects, though most people wouldn't know that. Understanding the problem, the cricket immediately squeezed through a small crack in the corner of the elevator

floor and made his way down cables and metal beams to exit on the sixth floor, where he quickly hopped to a window at the end of the hall. The window was slightly raised.

Once the cricket reached the window, he hopped up onto the sill and called to a parakeet on a window ledge of a neighboring building. Amazingly enough, the parakeet didn't eat the cricket upon landing on the sill beside him. Instead, the bird listened to what the cricket was telling him.

The parakeet, who was Percy's friend, immediately went to find the Pomeranian. Percy was not hard to locate because he was visiting Punkin's house, where he was often to be found.

Punkin was showing off a little for Percy by shredding a tissue. She loved to snatch facial tissues from the bathroom trash and shred them into gigantic mounds of shreds. Somehow, she could make a single tissue into a pile of shreds about the size of a bowling ball. Her owners never understood how she managed this, but they always admired her artistry while they were cleaning up the mounds and scolding her. And at those times, Punkin's name even got changed to Beast when her humans were complimenting her on her work.

Percy and Punkin were basically locked inside the house for now, because their humans had gone to the park down the block. Since the Pomeranians couldn't get out, the determined parakeet quickly set off to look for someone else who might be able to help.

Brick happened to be wandering around three blocks from Punkin's house, so the parakeet landed and related the problem to the Japanese Bobtail. Fortunately, the bird wasn't eaten by the cat in the process, because Brick decided to listen, instead of snack. Unfortunately, when the parakeet explained the situation, Brick didn't know what to do about a kid trapped in an elevator in a downtown building.

However, the cat did know of someone who might be able to figure out what to do. After assuring the parakeet that he would try to get help, Brick sped away at top speed toward

Krishna's house. Krishna liked cats, and Brick often enjoyed visiting the sheltie. It was quite a ways to Krishna's house on the outskirts of town, nearly two miles, in fact. But Brick was a fast cat.

Upon arriving, and catching his breath, Brick managed to tell Krishna what was going on. Immediately, Krishna made his way to the stretched part of the fence that was partly covered with the morning glory vine. With a little wriggling, he soon worked his head through the scratchy wire. As soon as his head was through, the rest was easy. Placing his right front paw into the gap by his neck, he worked his leg and shoulder through the opening. The left paw, leg, and other shoulder soon followed. Had he not been so flexible, Krishna might have found himself in a pretty big predicament. But his ribs gave a little, and the fence wire gave a little too, to stretch some more, so his middle section could slide through next. Then it was short work to get his hips to follow. He caught one of his back toes on the fence wire, but the toe didn't stay caught long.

Then Krishna ran as fast as he could toward downtown, while trying to keep to as many areas with trees and bushes as possible so as not to get caught by anyone. Brick had started off with him, but Krishna soon left the Japanese Bobtail far behind in an effort to reach the downtown building as quickly as possible.

When he reached the sidewalk in front of the high-rise, he got lucky right away because a tall man in a business suit was just exiting the building. While the door was still slightly ajar, Krishna ran inside. He found the elevator lobby quickly and immediately started making a ruckus, mainly by barking and whining, while running in small circles directly in front of the landing doors of the elevator that was stuck.

"Who brought their dog to work?" asked a woman wearing a blue dress and carrying a stack of file folders.

"He's not supposed to be in here," stated a man carrying a notebook computer and a briefcase. "What's wrong, boy?" he added, bending down to pat the sheltie on the head.

While still whining, and barking in short yips, Krishna jumped his front paws up onto the wall where the *up* and *down* buttons of the elevators were located. He wasn't able to push the buttons, but he was gaining the attention, and curiosity, of many people in the building. He again barked and ran in circles in front of the stuck elevator.

"He's trying to tell us something," said a shrewd woman in a green pantsuit.

Next, Krishna whined more frantically and started scratching at the elevator landing doors.

"It's something to do with the elevator," said the man with the computer. "I don't think it's moved since we've been standing here."

"Maybe someone's trapped," suggested the woman in the pantsuit.

At this point, Krishna started barking like crazy. *They had finally hit on it!*

"That's it! The elevator must be stuck!"

"Quick! Call Building Maintenance!"

With Krishna now slightly calmer and looking on, this was accomplished, and Austin was soon unstuck. Though he had been trapped for nearly an hour and a half, he was in time to get his medication from his mother.

A short while later, the building occupants looked for the dog that had saved the boy. However, Krishna could not be found because as soon as he saw that Austin was safe, he exited the building in the same way he entered, somewhat sneakily, to make his way home as quickly as possible. Just about the time he was squeezing back through the stretched fence wire, the woman in the green pantsuit remarked, "He must have been a guardian angel dog."

Chapter Three

The Lime Tree Caper

Zip was having a grand day. He had spent the morning on a nice long walk with Brian and Dennis. In the afternoon, his little brain began plotting to drink out of the toilets somehow. Even though the lids were almost always closed, Zip tried to get drinks from the toilets as often as possible because the water was always so cool and fresh. He really couldn't understand why he got into so much trouble for doing this. He was just in the process of trying to raise the lid of the toilet in the small bathroom with his forehead, because his nose wasn't quite strong enough, when he heard Conan bark to him from the vacant lot.

After listening to the barks carefully, Zip decided that the toilet plotting would have to wait until later because he was going to play in some sprinklers.

Conan had moved on by the time Zip exited the house via his doggie-door and made his way to the loose fence board. The German shepherd was trying to spread the word to as many dogs as possible that Mrs. Riley was running her sprinklers, in case anyone wanted to play in them.

Mrs. Riley's house had the magical kind of sprinklers, the ones that turned on and off without her even having to turn them on and off by a faucet. She had a magic box that let her run her sprinklers at any time, even when she wasn't home.

The loose fence board was even looser today and was easy to get through.

In the back yard of Mrs. Riley's house, Zip soon met up with Conan, Big-Wag, and one of Big-Wag's neighbors, a Weimaraner named Ghost. Big-Wag had sneaked out under his hedge again, and Ghost had jumped over her fence because she was a really good jumper.

The four of them played in the jets of water from the magical sprinklers for some time, before lying down in the shade together behind a large pittosporum bush.

Ghost was chewing on the end of her leash. She wasn't attached to her leash; she just always carried it with her in her mouth whenever she snuck out of her yard.

Most of the dogs in the area knew about *The Leash Laws*, but chose to ignore them. However, Ghost always followed rules, so she brought her leash with her when out and about because it was *The Law*. Dogs were supposed to have their leashes with them outside of their yards.

Zip and Conan resisted the urge to make fun of Ghost for carrying her leash around, partly because they knew it wasn't nice to make fun of other dogs, and partly because they knew Big-Wag wouldn't put up with it. He really liked Ghost.

After their rest in the shade, the four decided to do some exploring together in the country. They had just passed Mr. Goodfellow's farm, to say hello to a Jack Russell terrier, when they came across a tiny magician sitting on the porch of a shanty. The magician was not much bigger than a ten-inch garden gnome, and he had a long white beard that was so long it curled around his knees and ankles. The tiny man blew his nose very loudly into a yellow handkerchief and sniffled. The magician was very sad for some reason. He sniffled again as he patted Zip on the head.

"You four came to cheer me up, didn't you?" he said. "My lime tree has just been stolen by some boys," the magician continued. "So unless you can figure out how to get it back for me, the cheering up won't work."

The tiny man sniffled once more, and sighed, as Zip licked his hand. Scratching under Zip's collar, and behind his ears, the magician said, "I need the lime tree to make my hay-fever potion." He paused, and smiled, before adding, "But you probably thought I was crying, didn't you?"

"I guess maybe I was a little," the man admitted. "A friend gave me the lime tree last year. It was a pretty tree, in a pretty blue pot, a terra cotta pot."

Ghost whined sympathetically, and Big-Wag nuzzled the tiny magician's shoulder.

Zip suddenly had a great idea, which Conan also had, but Zip didn't know it. Growling a soft, "Let's go," to his friends, the blue heeler set off at a trot down the road with Big-Wag, Ghost, and Conan following.

When they were a short ways from the shanty, Zip told his friends, "Since we know a little something about the lime tree, that it's pretty and in a blue terra cotta pot, let's see if we can help get it back for the magician."

The others agreed immediately. *Yay! An important project to work on! Get back a stolen lime tree!*

Right away, the four started asking around.

Houdini happened to be out wandering, a couple of blocks away. He wasn't supposed to be out, but the tabby was a little bit like Krishna in that he was something of an escape artist. Houdini hadn't seen or heard of anything relating to a lime tree. However, he did suggest that the dogs check with a local giant who lived just over the hill, because the giant pretty much knew everything that was going on in the area.

This was a great idea, and the dogs set off straight away.

The giant who lived just over the hill looked exactly like a hill himself to non-magical human beings who happened to see him. But he looked just like a giant to the dogs, who could easily see magical creatures of all kinds in their magical forms. The giant was sitting next to huge boulder, while strumming a lullaby on a giant dulcimer.

Unfortunately, dogs usually couldn't speak actual words to magical creatures of human form such as witches, fairies, tiny magicians, and giants. (This was because dogs spoke animal language instead of people language.) So the dogs weren't sure how they were going to communicate with the giant.

When the four dogs reached him, with Big-Wag barking a hello, the giant smiled and stopped strumming to greet them. Ghost, who had set down her leash for a moment, was just in the process of working out how to successfully mime their quest for the missing lime tree, when the giant said,

“Hang on a minute.” He pulled a tiny cucumber seed from the pocket of his vest and popped it into his mouth. “Magic seed,” he announced. “In five seconds, I’ll be able to understand dog language.”

The dogs all wagged their tails politely and patiently for what they thought was five seconds. Then Conan barked, “We are looking for a stolen lime tree that is pretty and in a blue terra cotta pot. Have you seen anything like that lately?”

“As a matter of fact, I have,” stated the giant. “Three boys passed by not two hours ago, and one of them was carrying a pretty lime tree in a blue pot.”

The dogs all wagged excitedly, and Ghost yipped, “Where did they go? Did you see where they went?”

“Yes, I did,” the giant answered. “I can see quite well from up here. They turned down Cospot Lane.”

As Zip and Big-Wag both barked, “Thank you,” and sped away, with Ghost and Conan quickly following, the giant called after them. “That’s the street with the mulberry tree on the corner.” (The giant didn’t know that most dogs could read street signs.)

However, something really bad happened on the way to Cospot Lane. The dogs were in such a hurry that Ghost didn’t have a good grip on her leash, and she accidentally dropped it down a storm drain.

She was horrified. *I am out of the yard without a leash!* This was terrible! She was breaking *The Law*. Ghost was so upset, she sat right down on the storm drain grate and cried.

Big-Wag tried to comfort her, but it was no use. Zip and Conan peered into the drain, to see if they could retrieve the leash, but it had fallen too deeply. They could barely see the shiny silver hook in the shadows.

Ghost sniffed and moaned as she cried. She didn’t feel she could go on, and she was panicked in trying to think of a way to get back to her yard without her leash. She might get caught. *Then what would happen? Out of the yard without a leash!* She would probably get carted off to the dog pound.

It didn't matter that she was wearing a collar with her address engraved on it. She was still going to get into trouble and might have to spend time at the pound. And she had tried so hard, for so long, to always carry her leash with her.

Fortunately for the group, Conan was a quick thinker. There was a Machine Graveyard, which was really a unique garden made from an old junkyard, just half a block from the site of the leash-lost-in-the-storm-drain fiasco. He sped down the street and returned nearly as quickly.

"We're in luck," he said, placing a short length of rope at Ghost's feet. "I didn't even have to get inside; there was a pile of rope scraps right outside by the plum tree."

Ghost wasn't quite sure she understood, mainly because she was still fretting and fretting about *The Law*, so Conan explained, "The rope is just like a leash, even though it doesn't have a clasp. You can carry it just like your leash. Some people walk their dogs with pieces of rope, instead of leashes."

As she sniffed one last time, Ghost looked skeptically at the rope by her feet. She had never heard of people walking dogs with pieces of rope. But she finally had to believe Conan because he looked so serious. He was also a smart dog, so there was no reason to think he was wrong about this information.

Ghost picked up the rope gingerly. It was actually kind of soft and not unpleasant to have in her mouth. This made her feel better, and the group was soon able to move on to Cospot Lane.

The boys who had taken the lime tree had not even bothered to hide it. The pretty tree in the blue terra cotta pot was sitting next to the porch steps of a white frame house in the middle of the block. The dogs also didn't have to worry about how they were going to carry it back to the tiny magician because a red wagon was sitting on the other side of the porch steps. This was perfect! They could borrow the wagon and return it later.

Acting quickly, Big-Wag pulled the wagon into position, so Zip and Conan could tip the tree into it. After tipping the tree, it was easy for the two to nudge it into a better position so that the blue pot was supported by the wagon.

And they were off!

Conan and Big-Wag took turns pulling, while Zip pushed. Ghost was basically the lookout for the lime-tree rescuers. Since they pretty much had to travel sidewalks, roads, and flatter fields while moving the wagon, the dogs did pass a few people during their travels. The people all paused and laughed at the sight of the four dogs, wagon, and lime tree. But no one tried to stop them.

The dogs passed the giant still strumming his dulcimer on their way back to the tiny magician's shanty. The giant waved to them, and Zip barked back.

The tiny magician was overjoyed to see the crew with his lime tree. He gave them all special dog biscuit cakes and fresh water as a treat. Then he magically sent the red wagon back to Cospot Lane, so his new friends wouldn't have to spend their time taking it back.

Chapter Four

The Great House on the Hill

Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse lived in the Great House on the hill. He was a painted or pinto horse, half rust-colored and half cream-colored with just a splotch of light gray on his nose. Mrs. Astor lived in the Great House too, but she was away a good bit of the time on overseas escapades with her many friends. Her pet horse liked to travel too, on occasion, so he kept his hat and handbag on a fencepost in the yard for easy access when setting out on his own adventures.

Both hat and handbag were very classy. The hat was a pea green color. Its wide brim sported a pink polka dot ribbon and was decorated with Shasta daisies. The handbag was bright red with a brushed gold clasp and a thin braided strap.

While Mrs. Astor was away traveling, she employed a house sitter named Mrs. McReddy. Mrs. McReddy was staying at the Great House for the whole summer. However, she was currently in a spot of difficulty. She was a little heavy at present because she was about to give birth to twins. But that wasn't the main difficulty. The problem was that she had gotten stuck in a chair, and the chair was much too heavy for her to move. She couldn't lift it at all to try to get wriggled out of it, or to use the weight of the chair to get it to drop off of her by standing up. But the biggest problem of all was that she needed to be getting to the hospital to have her twins, and she couldn't reach the phone while she was stuck in the chair.

However, there was a slight bit of luck regarding the location of the chair, which was positioned directly in front of a window. Since the window was open, Mrs. McReddy was easily able to call to Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse. "Pet Horse! Pet Horse! I need your help! I'm stuck!"

Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse trotted up the hill to the house right away. Looking into the window, he could immediately see what was wrong.

Mrs. McReddy tossed the end of the blue scarf she had been wearing out of the window. "Pull on this," she said, as she tightly grasped the other end. Unfortunately, as hard as he pulled, Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse was unable to get the woman unstuck from the heavy chair.

"Go get help," Mrs. McReddy added. "Hurry!"

The horse was terribly worried about leaving the woman alone at a time like this, but he knew he didn't have a choice.

Fortunately, a grue named Ruse happened to be passing by on the lane beside the house. Grues were generally unpleasant magical creatures that looked something like a

cross between a troll and an ogre. But no matter how unpleasant they were, Grues were willing to help others in times of trouble, as long as it didn't inconvenience them too much.

"Well, I doubt I am any stronger than a horse," Ruse grumbled, "but I'll try to help."

However, even with Ruse and Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse both tugging on the blue scarf, Mrs. McReddy stayed stuck in the heavy chair.

Since the horse didn't want to leave the pregnant woman by herself, Ruse set off quickly down the lane to find more help. He soon came across Zip, Peanut, and Cocoa playing in a field. Peanut had his hot-dog squeaky toy with him, and the three were tossing it about and squeaking the hot dog ferociously.

The grue almost didn't stop, since these were fairly small dogs and probably couldn't help much. But he decided that maybe they could help a little while he searched for stronger creatures. After quickly explaining the problem to the dogs, who immediately took off down the lane towards the Great House, the grue set off again in search of others.

"Oh, good grief!" Ruse said in frustration. He was about a quarter-mile down the lane, and was standing in front of Honey, Houdini, and Pernilla, who were looking at him quizzically. They didn't often come across grues in their wanderings, and they had no idea what this one might be so frustrated about.

Shaking his head, Ruse said, "Whatever. The more the better, probably." He then quickly explained the problem to the cats, who bounded down the lane to join the efforts to get the lady unstuck from her chair.

Ruse got very lucky next because Sam and Tippi were also out and about. (It seemed the whole countryside was crawling with loose pets today.) The dogs and Ruse quickly ran back to the Great House together.

The cats had already made it there and were frantically tugging on the blue scarf, along with Zip, Cocoa, Peanut, and the horse.

“Get organized!” cried Ruse.

“Form a chain! Form a chain!” barked Zip.

This was a great idea!

Ruse took the front, with Mrs. Astor’s Pet Horse holding onto the back of the grue’s jacket with his strong teeth. Tippi then latched onto the tail of Mrs. Astor’s Pet Horse with her strong teeth. His tail was plenty strong enough, so the horse didn’t mind, especially for a good cause. Tippi wore a harness, instead of a collar, so Sam was able to latch onto the nylon straps for a good grip. Zip next grabbed onto Sam’s tail, who also didn’t mind, for a good cause. Cocoa then grabbed Zip’s tail. Peanut didn’t like the idea of pulling on Cocoa’s tail, so he grabbed onto her collar instead. Pernilla then took a good grip on Peanut’s tail with her teeth. *Well, I guess this is for a good cause*, thought Peanut, who never would have let a cat bite his tail at any other time. Houdini and Honey formed the caboose of this strange creature-train.

When they were all in position, Ruse took a firm grip on the blue scarf and yelled, “One, two, three...PULL!”

With a mighty tug, the grue, horse, dogs, and cats all pulled as hard as they could.

And it worked!

Their combined efforts were enough. Holding tightly to her end of the scarf with both hands, Mrs. McReddy, though straining and grunting a little, was slowly pulled out of her stuck position in the chair like a cork coming out of a bottle. And a small *pop* was heard as her rear end came loose.

In order not to get pulled out of the window, Mrs. McReddy immediately let go of the scarf at the moment of the *pop*. This caused Ruse to lurch backwards and knock into Mrs. Astor’s Pet Horse. With the horse also being pushed backwards, the dogs and cats got bumped as well, and the members of the creature-train basically knocked each other down like a line of toppling dominoes.

They were all breathless as they scrambled to get up, but they were happy that they had been able to get the lady unstuck.

Another bit of good luck was in the air today as well. On their way to visit a friend named Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, Larkspur and Alyssum had been passing by the Great House and had seen the strange line of tugging creatures. They quickly ran up the hill to see if there was anything they could do to help. As soon as Mrs. McReddy told them the problem, the girls ran next door to get a neighbor to drive the woman to the hospital.

The tiny twins were born late that night.

Mrs. McReddy got to see her rescuers again early the next morning, when all of them made a visit to the window of her hospital room to have a peek at the mother with her brand new baby boys.

Chapter Five Who's Afraid of a Gnarlbeast?

Big-Wag lived at Laurel Manor, a huge stone mansion in the exact middle of the Strawberry Estate. In addition to having celebrity owners, Big-Wag was something of a celebrity himself because he had once been *Second Row Dog* in a canned pet food commercial.

Since Big-Wag's owners were away from home a good bit of the time, a local college student named Colette was hired to help look after Big-Wag.

Colette bathed Big-Wag weekly. After his bath and blow dry, doggie deodorant was applied, which made Big-Wag smell like baby powder. Big-Wag also got his teeth brushed twice a week with a yummy, grape flavored teeth-brushing paste. And every day, he was brushed and fluffed. The

brushing activity also included some teasing with a rattail comb, and back-brushing around his ears, so Big-Wag would stay fluffy all day. This made him quite a bit pouffier than most other golden retrievers.

When Big-Wag wasn't spending time with Colette, he liked spending time with Mrs. Rosewood and Jeanne, who lived in Juniper Cottage—a small guesthouse on the estate. Mrs. Rosewood was the housekeeper for Laurel Manor, and Jeanne was Prima Della's personal assistant. However, Big-Wag didn't want to spend time with either of them right now because he was somewhat mad at them. They had recently blamed him for several broken objects in the house. Big-Wag never broke anything. He was a very careful dog. So these accusations were completely absurd. However, there was a very good explanation for the broken items. A gnarlbeast had recently taken up residence in the chimney of the den fireplace.

Gnarlbeasts were magical creatures that resembled old, gnarled tree roots. They were generally about eight inches high, and they liked to sleep up chimneys. The nasty creatures were only awake for one minute of each day, during which time, they liked to run about and smash things. So this was the reason for the broken items at Laurel Manor.

Most of the time, gnarlbeasts moved very fast, so they were rarely seen. They were sometimes seen *out of the corner of the eye*. But most people did not want to believe that they had actually seen something as gnarly as a gnarlbeast in their homes. Since the creatures were so difficult to see, and because some people were basically in denial about having seen them, the broken items were often blamed on young children and pets.

Big-Wag couldn't tell anyone about the gnarlbeast, of course, so this made him very frustrated. Also, because gnarlbeasts had sharp, woody claws, Big-Wag was afraid of the one in the chimney. So he usually stayed clear of the den at exactly 1:16 a.m. every morning. Each gnarlbeast's

waking minute was always exactly the same each day, though the times differed between individual gnarlbeasts.

It was just after midnight, and Big-Wag was lying on his doggie bed under the spiral stairs, chewing on the ear of his favorite toy—a soft, pale pink, stuffed animal elephant. Big-Wag had recently seen a real pink elephant. But that is another story.

Prima Della and Top Strawberry were gone for the week, so Big-Wag was completely alone in the house. However, he was expecting special visitors. A little earlier, he had used his nose to slightly raise a window in one of the bedrooms.

The first of his special visitors arrived shortly. Sassy was a two-inch, white toy poodle. She belonged to an enchanted little person named Francie who lived in the Miniature City of Nestlehaven.

A magical halcyon had carried Sassy to Laurel Manor in a sling, like a baby being delivered by a stork. As he greeted Sassy on the windowsill, Big-Wag just glimpsed the ghostly flutters of the departing bird.

The tiny poodle slid down the curtain to the seat of the green armchair next to the window. She then hopped onto Big-Wag's back, and the two ran to the kitchen to greet the next arriving visitor. Zip was just squeezing through the doggie-door when Big-Wag and Sassy made it to the kitchen.

Big-Wag had specifically asked his friends over to help him figure out what to do about the gnarlbeast. However, unfortunately, they were not going to be able to do anything because the only way to rid a home of a gnarlbeast was with a fairy spell called an *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm*. This was a spell that could only be performed while the gnarlbeast was awake, and the waking minutes of gnarlbeasts were sometimes difficult for fairies to figure out without watching chimneys around the clock.

About fifteen minutes after asking his friends' advice, with no good ideas coming to any of their minds, Big-Wag began whining and fretting about the gnarlbeast's approaching waking minute. Sassy and Zip were just as

afraid of the gnarlbeast as Big-Wag was, since most creatures with good sense feared the nasty creatures.

Big-Wag was especially troubled because a special object had just arrived and had been placed on a shelf in the den. The item was a birthday gift, a porcelain doll for Top Strawberry's little sister, who collected dolls. Big-Wag was very afraid that the gnarlbeast would break this special present. Zip and Sassy were afraid of this too, but they didn't know what to do, other than worry with Big-Wag.

However, the dogs weren't going to have to worry much longer because help was on the way. To Big-Wag's delight and surprise, Brandtii arrived at her aunt's house, accompanied by her friend, Sandpiper. The two fairies entered through the doggie-door in the kitchen just ten minutes before the gnarlbeast was due to wake.

"Big-Wag has visitors," said Sandpiper.

"Don't worry, boy," said Brandtii. "We won't tell on you. We're just here to get rid of the gnarlbeast."

Big-Wag couldn't believe his good fortune. Brandtii was the best thing that could have happened in this situation. Not only was she his friend, and relative, she was also a night-oriented fairy. Bat fairies were never *blind as bats*. They had excellent vision in the darkness. So Big-Wag was confident that she would be able to take care of matters.

Brandtii had heard that Big-Wag was getting blamed for broken objects in the house. But she knew better. When Mrs. Rosewood mentioned that a vase and several other items had been broken, Brandtii figured out there was a gnarlbeast in the house because she knew that Big-Wag never broke things and never would.

Big-Wag, Zip, and Sassy very much wanted to help get rid of the gnarlbeast. But they also knew that they needed to stay out of the way of the fairies. However, the dogs at least wanted to try to keep the gnarlbeast from doing too much harm on his final smashing rampage. So they followed the fairies to the den to help, if they could.

With their noses, Big-Wag and Zip pushed delicate objects inward on bookshelves and away from the edges of tabletops. Then Big-Wag helped Sassy get up to the shelf with the doll to stand guard over the precious object. The poodle rode atop Big-Wag's head as he put his front paws up on the ledge of the shelf to get her close enough to jump into position.

Meanwhile, Sandpiper and Brandtii were placing thin lines of glittering pixie dust on the windowsills in the den and along the bottoms of the two doors. The gnarlbeast would not be able to cross the pixie-dust lines in seeking a way out, and would be forced to retreat back to the chimney.

Then, hovering just in front of the fireplace hearth, the two fairies opened their handbooks. Since the *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm* was fairly long, and difficult to memorize, the girls wanted to make sure they got it right.

At exactly 1:16 a.m., a slight scratching noise was heard from inside the chimney. Then the dogs and fairies saw a twisted, root-like foot descend from the top right corner of the fireplace opening. Less than a second later, the gnarlbeast jumped down to the hearth in a crouched position with a soft *whoosh*, and a *thud* as he landed.

The gnarlbeast looked much like a mass of misshapen roots with dark brown bark covering his body. The creature also had sharp orange teeth and glittering black eyes, sunk deep into the cracks of his woody face.

Very quickly, Brandtii raised her invisible twig wand, and Sandpiper lifted her collectible mini spoon from Spain. Pointed directly at the creature, the two wands instantly glowed with a silver light. Immediately, the fairies began reciting:

*“For the sake of ones called Scab, Gall, and Mold,
your departure we soon hope to behold.
As an ode....”*

Zip and Big-Wag were standing in front of the shelf with the doll, and Sassy was standing directly in front of the doll on the shelf. Since the gnarlbeast saw no escape from the fairies' charm, he decided to do as much damage as possible during his last minute in this house. He streaked across the room to the bookcase the dogs were guarding and began knocking candlesticks, books, and knick-knacks off of the lower shelves.

*“...may you disappear in a sudden swift swirl.
With the help of the lovely Multi-Headed Rot,
may nastiness nest....”*

When the gnarlbeast had knocked the smaller items, and a couple of decorative wooden boxes, off of the lower shelves, he jumped up to the shelf occupied by Sassy and the doll. Sassy refused to move and barked ferociously at the nasty creature as he advanced on her.

Below the shelf, Big-Wag and Zip were jumping up as high as they could to try to reach the gnarlbeast to help Sassy. But he was just out of their reach.

Since the poodle wouldn't back down, and because his waking minute was soon to end, the gnarlbeast decided to try to get to a few more objects on the far end of the shelf. As he raced past the barking Sassy, who was still trying to protect the doll, the gnarlbeast knocked into the toy poodle and sent her sailing from the shelf out into the room.

“Save Sassy!” Zip howled frantically.

Big-Wag immediately flung his body backwards from the shelf to a position where he could, hopefully, break his friend's fall.

It was a very good thing that Big-Wag was one of the most fluffed-up creatures on the planet. His fluffiness was finally put to good use for something more than just puff and fancy. Because he was so puffed up, like a furry pillow, he was easily able to break her fall. Sassy bounced twice on his back, but was unharmed, other than being dizzy.

Just as Sassy was bouncing and landing, the fairies were finishing the charm:

*“...to the true Blue-Streaked Blight,
may your gnarly bark be worse than your bite,
NOW TAKE FLIGHT!”*

It worked! The spell was basically a verbal herbicide, with a little pixie dust and magic mixed in, of course. As soon as the girls finished speaking, the gnarlbeast glowed bright orange for an instant. Then his fiery image turned into a sort of mini tornado, which began spinning very quickly. Then the glowing beast withered up to just a floating red ash. Next, with a high-pitched whine, he was sucked across the room and up into the chimney, where he disappeared.

The spell hadn't killed the gnarlbeast because gnarlbeasts could not die. The *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm* simply sent the creature into another dimension, where he could exist with fellow gnarlbeasts among piles of ashes in ancient fireplaces such as those in the castles of myth and lore.

The dogs, fairies, and doll were all safe. Thank goodness. Before leaving, Sandpiper and Brandtii put all of the books, boxes, and knick-knacks back on the shelves, to leave the den in a fairly straightened-up state. One of the candlesticks had been damaged, but it was only a small dent. Then, patting the dogs on their heads, the fairies left through the doggie-door in the kitchen to fly back to their homes.

Zip left a few moments later by the same exit. But Sassy was staying the rest of the week with Big-Wag, to keep him company while his humans were away.

Chapter Six

Sand Castles and Baby Boas

Bishop, Zip, Percy, and Punkin were all strolling along the beach of a large lake near their homes. The lake wouldn't ordinarily have a beach on its shore, but the area residents had built it by hauling in countless truckloads of sand to make a beach park.

While they were strolling, the dogs noticed several sandcastles on the beach. No people were about today. The sandcastles were left over from a castle-building contest the previous weekend.

A little ways down the lakeshore, the dogs noticed Pernilla and Grover nosing around a particular sandcastle, so they went to see what the cats were up to.

What they discovered was very sad, and somewhat alarming. The Sandman was trapped in the castle. But he wasn't exactly inside. Instead, he was part of the castle, as though he had become attached somehow, or else the castle had become part of him.

This particular sandcastle was bewitched and had been made especially to trap magical creatures. The Sandman, who happened to be passing by, had been lured into the cursed structure. And since he was made of sand himself, the Sandman had melded with the sand of the castle. The dogs and cats could just see his head, long beard, one shoulder, and one foot sticking out of the castle walls.

Being trapped like this was very frustrating. The Sandman couldn't break free from the sandcastle because he was now a part of it, and would break to pieces himself if the castle got broken apart.

The dogs and cats didn't have any idea of what to do to help the Sandman escape from the castle. However, the Sandman did know what needed to be done. "This castle is out of reach of the lake tides," he said. "Water is needed to get me out. I won't be affected by the water, but the castle will. All sandcastles bend to water, even bewitched ones."

This was all the dogs and cats needed to know. They immediately set off down the shore to try to find something in which to carry water. They were in luck. Several buckets, sand toys, and molds had been left on the beach from the weekend sandcastle contest.

As quickly as possible, the rescue crew filled the buckets and molds with water from the lake, and carried them to the bewitched sandcastle, dumping the contents over both the castle and the Sandman.

After about ten minutes of water carrying and dumping, the hardworking dogs and cats succeeded in melting away enough of the castle to free the Sandman.

“Thank you so much,” he said, stretching his legs, and brushing wet sand from his shoulders and knees.

The Sandman next told his rescuers that Drommelak, the evil dream spirit responsible for producing most of the world’s nightmares, probably had something to do with this bewitched sandcastle. The Sandman always had to be on the lookout for Drommelak’s mischief.

The dogs and cats kept the Sandman company for a bit on his way down the shore to reach a neighboring town where he was needed to help some of the residents get a good night’s sleep.

While they were traveling, the group came upon a pit dug in the sand that was filled with baby boa constrictors. There were seven baby boas in all. The dogs, cats, and Sandman had never seen anything like this in this area. As far as they knew, the only boas in the region were either in zoos or kept in homes as people’s pets. They had never seen this type of snake in the wild in this part of the country.

The Sandman speculated that these might have been stolen from someone, which sounded like a reasonable explanation.

“It’s not safe for them to be out here in this pit,” said the Sandman. “We should try to help them get back to their home.”

This sounded like a good idea. However, the dogs and cats had no idea what the Sandman had in mind. So they were basically put into a state of shock when the Sandman bent down and gently lifted two of the baby snakes out of the pit to place them atop the backs of Bishop and Percy. Two more snakes followed to land on top of Grover and Zip. Punkin and Pernilla received their riders next. And the Sandman carried the seventh baby boa around his neck.

“We need to get these babies to Melba,” stated the Sandman, ignoring the cringes of the dogs and cats, along with their looks of dismay, and whimpers, at having to carry snakes.

Melba was the cook at the brownie orphanage. She was also a witch.

“Melba is very connected to animals, and she can communicate with snakes,” added the Sandman. “She’ll be able to find out where these little guys belong.”

Getting all the way to Fraser House, also known as the brownie orphanage, took some doing, because the dogs and cats were very freaked out at having to carry snakes. Punkin and Grover were the least bothered because they had seen snakes up close before. But they were still very unsettled by this new experience, just as their friends were.

The snake-carrying crew delivered the boas to Melba in her apartment above the garage at Fraser House. The witch did indeed know what needed to be done with the snakes. But the dogs and cats didn’t stay to find out what was going to happen to the baby boas. Instead, they all ran down to the lawn next to the garage, where they took long rolls in the grass to scratch their backs and wipe the snake-feel off of their fur.

After thanking the rolling and scratching dogs and cats for their help, the Sandman set off toward the neighboring town, whose residents were currently experiencing terrible, widespread insomnia.

The dogs and cats then set off toward their homes to try to forget about their snake experience.

Chapter Seven

The Very Important Day

When Zip was very young, he dreamed about being part of a dog and pony show. (Everyone loves dogs and ponies.) But he soon outgrew these thoughts. Dog and pony shows were nothing but puff and fluff, and Zip wanted to do more important things with his life than just be part of a show. He wanted to make a real difference, which is exactly what he did on many of his adventures.

One particular day near the end of summer, Zip was out and about by himself looking for something interesting to do. Though he didn't know it, this day would turn out to be very important, even though it would hold no encounters with gargoyles, tiny magicians, gnarlbeasts, or enchanted sandcastles.

As he was wandering around, Zip saw two fairies in the distance. Blue and Thistle were sitting together on a rock overlooking a small river. Zip decided that he would like to have his ears scratched, so he made his way toward the girls. However, he stopped short in his tracks when he noticed something else heading toward the fairies. A scorpion was on the rock directly behind Thistle and Blue, and was moving toward the girls. Because their backs were turned, and because scorpions hardly ever made any noise, the fairies were unaware of the approaching creature.

After his brief moment of startled pause, Zip sprang into action. Barking frantically, he raced toward Thistle and Blue. The girls immediately turned to see what the ruckus was about, which allowed them to see the scorpion. They rose hovering into the air to avoid the encounter and flew over the insect to greet Zip on his way to save them.

He got his ears scratched for quite awhile by the grateful fairies.

The next event that happened on this important day occurred near the railroad tracks. A brand new puppy had gotten out of his yard somehow and was nosing around the

tracks. Zip was just in time to keep the puppy from getting hit by a fast-moving train, and to teach his new friend about the dangers of railroad tracks and trains. Zip was happy to teach things like this to other dogs, and even cats, when he could.

When Zip was returning to his house after teaching the puppy about trains, he came across a garden gnome named Mr. Dusel. "Hello, boy," said the gnome, patting Zip on his neck. "I'm going to show you something very important, and tell you a pretty big secret."

Zip loved to see important things, and he loved secrets.

Mr. Dusel led Red Zipper to a secluded spot in the woods where a fern was blooming. A single, soft pink bloom was tucked amongst the curly fronds.

"There is a magical legend surrounding ferns," Mr. Dusel told Zip. "Ferns bloom one single time per year, but only very briefly. This blossom will completely disappear by this afternoon. However, anyone lucky enough to see a fern in bloom will be blessed with wealth and great joy for the rest of their lives."

This was a giant and amazing secret! To thank the gnome for sharing this information, Zip gave Mr. Dusel slobbery wet kisses on his neck and face. Then he zipped away as quickly as possible towards home. He had to find Dennis and Brian fast. They needed to see this to have good fortune and happiness for the rest of their lives.

Unfortunately, Dennis and Brian were not home. Moe was there. But Moe didn't particularly need to see a blooming fern plant. He was already a fortunate and happy guinea pig. Plus, it would have taken most of the day to lead the slow-moving Moe to that spot in the woods.

Zip squeezed out the loose fence board once more, trying to figure out where the boys might be. They might have gone to Fraser House to visit some of their brownie friends. While Zip was trotting along toward the brownie orphanage, he came across a terribly sad man sitting on a bench in Kraft Park. The man was in much worse shape, as far as crying,

than the tiny magician had been. He was sobbing, but was trying so hard not to cry that his face was nearly beet red.

Zip couldn't imagine what might be wrong. Something terrible must have happened. Since he could not ask the man what was troubling him, Zip hopped up onto the bench and sat down next to him. Then he patiently waited, hoping the man would share his problems. Zip was often able to help with problems. And just as animals often did not need to speak to be understood, people could communicate in other ways too.

For a time, they just sat together, with the man sobbing, while Zip watched him, patiently waiting. After a few minutes, the man couldn't resist reaching out to pet the dog, which is exactly what Zip knew would happen. No one could sit next to a dog for any length of time without reaching out to pet the dog's fur or scratch behind the soft ears. That was just the way it was. Even dogs who hadn't had a bath for a while got their ears scratched when they sat next to people.

Since the man had finally touched him, Zip lay down and put his head in the man's lap, whining sympathetically. The sad man never spoke a word, so there was no way for Zip to know why he was so blue with such a red face. However, after petting Zip for few more minutes, the man stopped crying. Looking up, Zip even saw the man smile a little, but only briefly.

Then Zip had a brilliant idea. This was the answer to the fern problem. This must be the reason he couldn't find Dennis and Brian. They weren't meant to see the blooming fern; this man was supposed to see the blossom, to become happy and have good fortune.

Hopping down from bench, Zip gently tugged on the man's trouser cuff, hoping to make him understand that he needed to show him something.

After a bit more tugging, with Zip whining a little too, the man sighed and softly said, "Okay, I'll come," as he slowly

stood up. He sighed again as he followed the dog along the gravel walkway winding through a grove of redbud trees.

Before heading off to the woods though, Zip led the man to the pond at the rear of Kraft Park. There was a brand new brood of baby ducks swimming around behind their mother. Baby ducks could cheer anyone up. Zip was right. The man smiled as he watched the fuzzy birds paddling about.

Tugging again on the man's pant cuff, Zip then headed off through the trees toward the secluded spot with the blooming fern. The man trustingly followed, which made Zip happy. This man was definitely meant to see the flower and have good fortune.

When they reached the spot, Zip was relieved to see that the fern was still blooming. They weren't too late.

The man didn't say anything for a few moments. Then he said, "A blooming fern. You are a pretty smart dog. The only thing more rare is a red fern." (This gentleman happened to be a botanist, and he knew a lot about plants, including the legends surrounding them.)

"Thank you, little guy," the man said, patting Zip's head. "This is really special."

However, the man was in for an even bigger treat as the two made their way back to the park. Fern happened to be out and about, exploring the woods today. And her fairy spirit came from a reddish-green fern. Her friends often joked that she looked like a fern fairy heading into autumn because of the orange and red tones of her dress.

When Fern saw the man and Red Zipper, she landed in a niche next to a tree root, so she wouldn't get noticed as a flying fern. She then sat very quietly and didn't move. The man, who was very observant, especially with regards to plants, definitely noticed the fern.

He shook his head as he stood in front of Fern's position, about three feet from her. He made no move to touch her, so she didn't need to flee. Instead, he crouched down and said, "I can't believe it. Both in the same day—a blooming fern and a red fern."

Next, the man closed his eyes. “Make a wish on a red fern,” he breathed softly, “and the wish will come true.”

He opened his eyes about a minute later and stood up, following Zip out of the woods. “Life is definitely worth living,” the man said, as he patted the dog goodbye next to the duck pond.

Zip yipped a short farewell bark as he headed off towards home.

However, the events of the important day weren’t over yet. Just as Zip was slipping through the loose fence board to get back into his yard, he witnessed the most terrible thing he had ever seen.

Mr. Simmons was in the process of using a chainsaw to cut a huge, five-foot log in half. The log was from a tree he had recently cut down. A wood block was wedged under the tree trunk to keep the log from rolling. However, the log evidently wasn’t braced as well as it should have been, and Mr. Simmons was downhill from the log. As the teeth of the chainsaw started tearing into the bark, the friction caused the log to move and roll over the block that was supposed to hold it in place. Mr. Simmons was immediately crushed under the heavy log.

Zip raced up to his owner, who wasn’t moving. But the log was too heavy for Zip to move! He then ran to the house and entered his doggie-door, barking wildly. No one was home! And Moe couldn’t do anything to help!

Zip raced back outside at once and headed to the loose board. Mr. Simmons still wasn’t moving. He was unconscious under the log.

Good fortune was with Zip today (probably due to the fern blossom) because Sam happened to be passing the vacant lot. Sam could help! He was strong!

However, Sam couldn’t fit through the loose fence board. The Great Pyrenees had one shoulder through the opening, and was trying to knock another board loose too, but he couldn’t quite manage it. But Zip knew what to do. There was a place about ten feet down the fence line where two

boards were starting to rot. These were older boards that had not been replaced when the fence was mended after a recent windstorm, and they were not as strong as the surrounding boards.

Using his curl-into-a-ball-and-roll technique, Zip rammed into the fence over and over again to try to break the boards. Sam noticed what Zip was doing and came to help. The strong Great Pyrenees had no problem breaking the two boards with his powerful shoulder, which opened up plenty of room for him to enter the yard.

The two rushed to Mr. Simmons, who was still unconscious. It took some doing, but Sam was able to use his strength to roll the log off of the man.

Next, the dogs were very relieved to hear Mrs. Simmons' car arriving in the front driveway. Sam stayed with Mr. Simmons while Zip raced around front.

Brian and Dennis were with their mom, having just come from the grocery store. The first thing Zip did was bark wildly as he jumped onto the front porch. He knocked over a broom and pushed two pairs of shoes off the edge of the porch. Then, racing up to Brian, Zip tugged on his pant cuff very hard.

"What's wrong with him?" asked Mrs. Simmons, unloading a grocery bag from the trunk of her car.

"I don't know," said Brian. "He's definitely worked up about something."

Zip then raced around the car to Dennis and started tugging very hard on his pant leg as well.

"He's acting like Lassie," said Dennis.

"Maybe someone's in trouble," suggested Brian.

As the family members all looked at one another in fear, Zip raced to the corner of the house, pausing only for a moment to bark loudly, to make sure the boys and Mrs. Simmons were going to follow.

Mrs. Simmons dropped her groceries on the ground as she ran to catch up with her sons, who were already rounding the house to the back yard.

Sam had been licking Mr. Simmons' face, and it was working. He was slowly coming to. Mrs. Simmons had her phone with her and immediately called an ambulance, as Brian and Dennis kneeled beside their father. They didn't move him because they were afraid he might have hurt his back. But the ambulance made it to the house in short time, and the Emergency Medical Technicians braced Mr. Simmons' neck and put him onto a stretcher. Then they transported him to the local hospital.

Sam came back for a short visit late in the evening, by which time, Mrs. Simmons and the boys had returned from the hospital, very relieved that Mr. Simmons was going to be okay. In fact, he would be able to come home the next day.

Just before bedtime, Dennis and Brian came out to the back yard to throw Zip's ball for him.

Having missed the chance to show the boys the fern blossom, Zip didn't want his humans to miss something else special that was going on. On this particular night, shooting stars were visible every thirty seconds or so. By barking and looking up to the skies, Zip was able to alert the boys to the shooting stars, so they could make wishes upon them.

Chapter Eight Barking in the Park

Barking in the Park was an annual charity event held in Kraft Park. Local dogs and their owners got to participate in fun activities, and the proceeds from the event, including entry fees and profits from concession stands, benefited several local animal shelters.

Peanut and Marigold were visiting with Conan and Dove when Brandtii arrived with Big-Wag. She was looking after

him for the day. Brian and Dennis shortly arrived with Zip. Several other brownies and fairies were also present for the park festivities including Jamal, Conner, Mark, Swan, Aloe, and Heather.

Sam also came with his human, Jayne. But since Jayne didn't know any of the fairies and brownies, she and Sam spent their time visiting with other people and dogs.

Krishna and Becky had arrived very early because the agility competition was held first. After running the course twice, Krishna came in second to a border collie. But second was fine with both Krishna and Becky, mainly because the agility course was so much fun. It didn't really matter who won, as long as everyone was having fun.

Jack Russell terrier races were held next. They were really funny to watch. The Jack Russell from Mr. Goodfellow's farm was there, but he didn't win his race.

Tippi was on the far side of the park with her human, showing off her leaping and catching skills in the flying-disc exhibition. She received a purple ribbon, along with all of the other flying-disc dogs, because the exhibition was not a competition.

Big-Wag had loads of fun watching the water long-jump that featured mainly retrievers and other types of water dogs. But Big-Wag was glad he was not competing. He didn't want to get wet because he didn't want to lose his fluff.

The event also hosted a picnic for both people and dogs, featuring many of their favorite foods such as hot dogs, ice cream, hamburgers, chews, biscuits, and bacon treats.

At one point, all of the dogs were allowed to run around together off of their leashes. However, Ghost, who had arrived rather late with her humans, still carried her leash with her, as always. Her new leash was bright green, and she loved it very much.

In the late afternoon, when the Barking in the Park activities were winding down, several of the dogs spied a few of the area cats hanging around the apricot tree at the edge of the park.

Zip, Conan, and Big-Wag ran to greet Pernilla, Grover, Honey, and Houdini.

“So, is your dog event pretty much over with?” asked Houdini.

“Yes,” answered Zip. “We were just getting ready to go home.”

“Well,” mewed Pernilla, “we wanted to talk to you. It’s been pretty hectic lately, and we haven’t had time to meet to divide up the territories.”

“Yes,” agreed Big-Wag. “We’ve been busy too.”

“So we’ve been talking,” said Houdini. “Maybe we could just leave things as they are for now, until things settle down and we have more time to discuss the issue.”

“That’s fine with us,” responded Conan, looking at Big-Wag and Zip, who were nodding.

“So we should just keep things as they are for now,” purred Honey.

To which Big-Wag replied, “That sounds good.”

“Okay,” said Pernilla and Grover together.

The dogs and cats just looked at one another for a few moments.

Then Zip yipped, “Good, that’s settled.”

“Okay then,” responded Houdini.

With this, the four cats sauntered away.

When they were out of earshot of the dogs, Pernilla told the other cats, “As many times as we had to help them this summer, they’d never be able to survive without us.”

“Exactly,” agreed Houdini, with Grover nodding. “If we divided up the territories, they would be lost without our help.”

The cats all heartily agreed with each other that the poor dogs would never be able to survive without regular help from the area cats.

Meanwhile, back at the park, Conan was telling Zip and Big-Wag, “It’s good to keep things as they are, because the cats really need our help.”

Zip and Big-Wag were nodding, and Big-Wag said, “I doubt they would be able to manage on their own.”

“Yes,” growled Conan. “They would be totally helpless and lost without us.”

The cats and dogs never again met to discuss dividing up territories, but they did often help one another in their efforts to save the world, or, at least, their little corner of the world.

Author Note

When Fern grows up, she writes a children’s book called *Red Zipper*. Before J.H. Sweet wrote this other book about Red Zipper, she consulted Fern, who stated that she didn’t mind at all having some of Zip’s adventures recorded in a separate storybook.