

Foo and Friends

A colorful illustration of a ghost sitting on a wooden porch swing. The ghost has a pale, greenish-yellow complexion, a wide-eyed, somewhat vacant expression, and is wearing a brown top hat, a brown long-sleeved shirt, and green trousers. The swing is suspended by two ropes from a large window with a white frame. The porch has a wooden floor and a dark railing. To the right, a red door with a small window is visible. The background shows a blue sky and green foliage.

The Porch Swing Ghost

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To all friendly ghosts

Foo and Friends



The Wishing Well
The Garage Sale
The Fake Foo
The Porch Swing Ghost



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Contents

Chapter One
The Swinger
7

Chapter Two
Doorbell Tricks and
Other Mischief
17

Chapter Three
Midnight Meeting
25

Chapter Four
The Playground Project
33

Chapter Five
Twelve Arms
41

Chapter Six
The Stakeout
49

Chapter One

The Swinger

Foo couldn't believe it! Directly across from his house, a ghost was sitting in Mrs. Clark's porch swing. *Foo Magic* likely wasn't going to be necessary to get the ghost to skedaddle, because this clearly wasn't an evil spirit. He was basically a run-of-the-mill ghost, of the sort that wandered aimlessly and usually only ended up scaring people by accident. However, even run-of-the-mill ghosts knew better than to flaunt themselves in

front of a magical foo dog, whose job was to protect neighborhoods from wandering spirits.



Foo wasn't going to be able to cross the street to talk to the ghost until later because his owners were at home. And this happened to be the time of day when they liked to look out of the front windows. If Foo was missing from his usual spot by the front steps, his owners would almost certainly notice. Most of the magical lawn and garden ornaments in the neighborhood didn't wander around during the daytime anyway for fear of alarming people.

The ghost even had the nerve to flutter a wispy hand at Foo, who shook his head in disbelief. Even though he was sporting his ever-present foo-dog smile, Foo was actually quite angry. And the longer he sat and watched the ghost, the angrier he became. As Foo kept an eye on the swinging spirit, he counted the hours until

sundown when he would be able to cross the street and give the ghost a big dose of What-For.

Four hours to go, thought Foo, with satisfaction.

Foo counted passing butterflies for awhile. However, just as he was thinking, *Only three hours now*, the ghost suddenly rose from the swing to slink across the porch and float down the street. Looking back at Foo, the spirit stopped for a short swing in the Wilson's tire swing. Again, Foo couldn't believe the nerve of this ghost.

The ghost swung only for a few minutes before sauntering away in the direction of the park. It appeared that Foo's What-For talk with the ghost was going to have to wait.

However, as it turns out, Foo wasn't going to have to wait long at all to talk to

the ghost. Just before dawn the next morning, as he was stretching his legs around the neighborhood, Foo found the spirit swinging in the park swing set.



Foo was glad to catch up to the ghost so quickly. Bounding up to the swings, he breathlessly said, “I want a word with you!”

“Hi!” exclaimed the ghost. “I’m Betherby.”

“Nice name,” snarled Foo, meaning just the opposite. “Look here!” added Foo. “Just who do you think you are? Ghosts are not allowed on my block.”

“Why not?” asked Betherby.

“Because it’s the job of foo dogs to keep evil spirits away from people’s houses,” Foo responded.

“I’m not evil,” said the ghost.

“That doesn’t matter,” said Foo, shaking his head in frustration. “The rule applies to all spirits and ghosts because I can never be sure who’s evil and who’s not, especially from a distance.”

“But I –”

“I don’t want to hear your *buts*,” said Foo. “You stay away from the porch swing across from my house,” he warned. “And I don’t want to see you anywhere near the Wilson’s tire swing again either.”

Quietly, with a soft look of pain on his face, the ghost tried again. “But it’s nice to sit in the porch swing. I like to watch the birds in the birdbath, and I like to sing with the wind chimes.”



Foo shook his head again. “No,” he firmly said. “You are not welcome in this neighborhood.”

“I’ve been here for two weeks,” said the ghost, “and no one else seems to mind.”

“We can’t have ghosts wandering around doing who knows what,” responded Foo.

“But I just told you what I was doing,” complained Betherby. “Anyway, the people in the house invited me to sit in the swing. That’s why they didn’t tie it up.”

Foo couldn’t believe what he was hearing, and he was speechless as Betherby added, “When people don’t tie their porch swings to posts to keep them still, they are inviting ghosts to have a swing in them.”

“That’s an old superstition!” (Foo had finally found his voice, and it was loud.)

“Most people don’t know about tying up porch swings! They don’t know anything about that kind of stuff. And I don’t let ghosts roam this neighborhood!”

“I’m not roaming,” said Betherby, “I’m swinging. And I’m not hurting anybody. I’m not going to scare anyone because I’m not that kind of a ghost. And I’ll move if anyone wants to sit in the swing.”

Foo was not going to listen to any more. “I’m warning you!” he said. “Don’t come back to that house again.” As he was turning to leave, Foo added, “And get out of this neighborhood.”

Betherby sat swinging after Foo left. He looked sadly at the ground by his feet as he thought, *Where else can I go?* He had finally found a neighborhood that he really loved, and he couldn’t believe a foo dog wasn’t going to let him stay.

As the sun showed itself to the day,
Betherby rose from the swing and slowly
drifted across the fields of the park toward
a small copse of trees where he could hide,
and think.

Chapter Two

Doorbell Tricks and Other Mischief

The day passed quietly, and Foo was very pleased with himself to have driven Betherby away.

Just after dark, Gilbert, the wire reindeer, bounded up to tell Foo some news. “Someone has been playing doorbell tricks at a house on Gristmill Lane,” he said.

“What do you mean?” asked Foo

“Someone rings the doorbell,” Gilbert explained, “then they run away before the person answers the door.”

“I’ve heard of that before,” said Foo. “It’s just kids playing a joke.”

Gilbert was shaking his head. “It can’t be,” he said. “The kids in the neighborhood are all in school when it’s happening.” Wide-eyed, he added, “It’s been going on for two weeks now.”

After Gilbert left, Foo thought, *I bet it’s that ghost. He probably gets bored with swinging and ends up playing tricks to pass the time. Good thing I chased him off.*

At exactly noon the next day, Foo got a pretty big shock when Betherby came gliding down the street to again take up residence in Mrs. Clark’s porch swing.

Again, Foo couldn't believe it. *That ghost couldn't take a warning! Doesn't he know what a foo dog can do?*

Foo sat fuming for the rest of the afternoon because Betherby never moved from the porch swing. The ghost just sat swinging while watching birds and singing along with the wind chimes.



Betherby had been trying to figure out what to do since he met with Foo in the park. He didn't want to leave this neighborhood because it was one of the nicest he had ever come across. *The foo dog just doesn't know me, he thought. If I stick around, he'll get to know me, and he'll see that I'm not an evil ghost.*

Meanwhile, Foo was getting madder and madder as he watched Betherby swing. As soon as it got dark, Foo crossed the street to talk to the spirit. He tried to stay calm, even though he was very angry.

"I told you to leave," said Foo, gritting his teeth.

"But this swing faces that pretty garden over there," Betherby said, pointing. "I just want to sit here once in awhile. It's so peaceful. There aren't many peaceful spots in this world."

“I bet you are the one playing doorbell tricks on Gristmill Lane,” Foo suddenly accused.

“No, that’s not me,” replied Betherby.

“Well, who else could be doing it?” said Foo. “It’s been going on for exactly as long as you’ve been around.”

“I happen to know who’s doing it,” said the ghost, “but I don’t feel comfortable telling you. I’m not a tattletale.”

After a short pause, Betherby added brightly, “But tell me a little bit about yourself. Why don’t you have a partner? Most foo dogs have a partner. And where were you made?”

Foo was in no mood for a friendly chat. “I’m going to give you one last chance to leave on your own,” he said sternly. “If you don’t leave, I’ll use *Foo Magic* on you. However, I’d prefer it if you just get up and go quietly.”

Betherby's feelings were very hurt. The foo dog wasn't even willing to get to know him, not even a little.

Slowly, the ghost rose from the swing. With a last, forlorn look at Foo, he floated off the porch and down the street where he disappeared into the gathering evening mist.

Foo trotted home, feeling very satisfied. *That should do it*, he thought.

Taking up his usual spot by the porch steps, Foo was surprised to see Mel, the garden gnome, running across the lawn towards him. Mel arrived out of breath, but managed to rasp out, "Robbery on the next block!"

"When?" asked Foo in surprise.

"Sometime between two and three in the afternoon." Finally catching his breath somewhat, Mel added, "Twelve things

were taken from the Lipford's house, and nobody saw or heard anything.”

“Oh, that's terrible,” said Foo. In the back of his mind, Foo was thinking, *It couldn't have been Betherby because he was swinging all afternoon.* Foo also knew that run-of-the-mill ghosts didn't usually steal things, because they had no use for things.

Mel left a few moments later to continue spreading the news of the robbery around the neighborhood.

Normally, Foo would be the first to offer help to other lawn and garden ornaments as far as protecting the neighborhood. However, his mind was very full of his dealings with Betherby. Even though the robbery was big news, Foo was sure that Anton, the gargoyle living at the house next to the Lipford's, had things well under control. The stone

collies, Jack and Tessie, also lived on that street. *They should be able to take care of things well enough,* thought Foo. *I have my own street, and a nasty ghost, to worry about.*

Chapter Three

Midnight Meeting

The burglar struck again the next morning. Henrietta, the plastic owl, reported the robbery to Foo at noon. This time, twelve things were taken from the Crawford's house, just two doors down from where Henrietta lived.

“I never saw anything from my perch on the porch,” said Henrietta. “And I have very good eyesight. I just can't believe it.”

Foo was puzzled too.

“We’re having a midnight meeting to discuss the problem,” Henrietta told Foo, “in Mrs. Hubbard’s side yard.”

“I’ll be there,” said Foo.

Henrietta nodded as she flew off to spread the word.

At five minutes to midnight, the squirrels in the ash tree across the street arrived to keep watch for Foo so he could go to the meeting.

As Foo arrived in Mrs. Hubbard’s side yard, he heard Spence, the gigantic bronze gorilla statue, say, “If anybody tries to steal me, I’ll just stomp on them.” Foo could understand why Spence might be worried about robbers because bronze statues were very valuable.

Mrs. Hubbard’s stone garden angel, Sophia, welcomed Foo. “Hello,” she said. “We were just talking about the robberies. This is all very troubling.”



Neil, the tiny stone snail from the Baxter's koi pond, was worried too. "What are we going to do?" he said. "Some of us are too small to stop burglars."

"We'll just have to be more watchful," said Henrietta.

Pinkie, the plastic flamingo, was nodding. “We’ve lived in a safe neighborhood for so long, we’ve forgotten how to properly keep watch.”

The refreshments at the meeting were nothing like the spreads they usually prepared for their midnight get-togethers; in fact, the food was downright wimpy. One tiny plate of pretzels (not even chocolate dipped) sat forlornly in the middle of the cedar bench, with a small bunch of browning bananas beside it.



“The people can’t even figure out how burglar is getting in,” said Neil. “No windows have been broken; no locks have been tampered with.”

“This is certainly a mystery,” said Pinkie.

“And who’s playing the doorbell tricks at the Hollisters’ house?” said Mel. “That’s what I’d like to know.”

“Never mind that,” said Anton, who had just arrived. “That’s not important right now. What’s the plan for stopping the burglaries?”

“Well,” said Foo, “you keep watch on your block, with help from Jack and Tessie. I’ll keep watch on my block. Sophia and Mel can take care of things on this side of the neighborhood. And Spence can handle anything close to the school.”

Mel was nodding. “That does pretty well cover things, even for Pinkie, Henrietta, and Neil.”

“Can you do some extra roaming for a few nights, Foo?” asked Sophia. “The squirrels can usually keep watch for you, can’t they?”

“It would be a great comfort,” Anton told Foo, “to know that you are keeping a close eye on things, and that *Foo Magic* will be available in an emergency.”

“Unfortunately,” replied Foo, “I can’t leave my street for very long these days. I’m dealing with a nasty ghost who keeps coming back to the house across from mine.”

Though Foo’s friends were somewhat disappointed, they understood, and they were determined to do the best they could on their own.

“But what are we going to do about the Playground Project tomorrow night?” asked Spence. “Should we cancel it?”

Foo had completely forgotten about this important annual event. Each year, the friends in the neighborhood got together to help clean up and fix up any run-down equipment in the park playground.

“We’ll have to do the project in two shifts,” said Sophia, “so only half of us will be gone from our homes at once.”

“The sparrows and doves in our part of the neighborhood can help keep watch while we’re gone,” said Mel.

Spence was nodding. The mockingbirds on his block often liked to help him out.

“There’s a little mole in my yard that can probably keep watch for me,” said Pinkie.

Since every part of the neighborhood had creatures willing to help keep watch, the group decided to go forward with the Playground Project in two shifts. After deciding who would take each shift, the friends left for their homes.

Chapter Four

The Playground Project

Just after dark the next night, the first shift of friends met in the park to begin the Playground Project. This included Anton, Spence, Pinkie, Neil, Mel, and Georgie, the cherub from Mrs. Addams' backyard fountain.

Before getting to work, Pinkie and Spence couldn't resist playing a short game of badminton. Mel and Georgie joined in, while Anton and Neil cheered their friends on.



As soon as the game ended, they set to work. Together, they fixed the corners of the sandboxes, repaired the volleyball net, sanded rust from the slides, painted the monkey bars, cleaned out the carp pond, and re-rope the tether balls.

They kept a close eye on the time as they worked because they needed to get back to their homes before the next shift of friends was due to leave theirs.

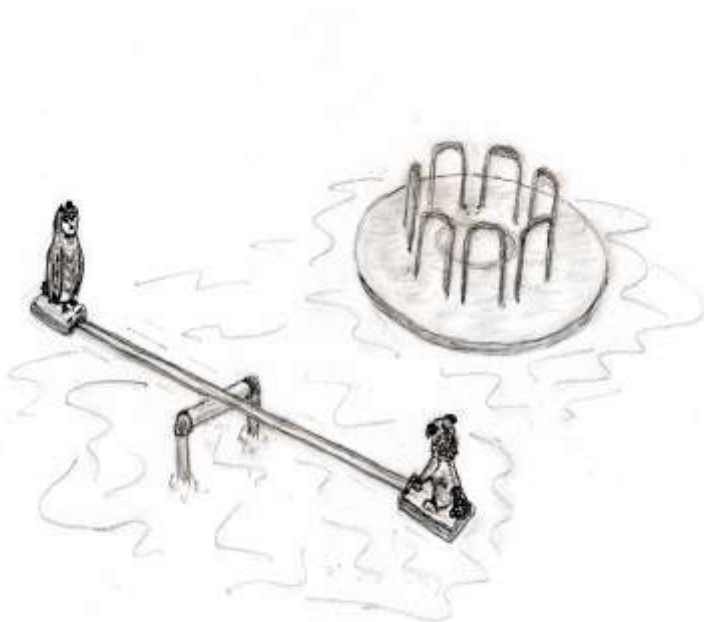
Three hours passed quietly, and the group soon packed up their tools to head for home.

The shift change went smoothly, and every member of the first group was back at home before the next set of friends set off for the park.

The second shift included Foo, Gilbert, Henrietta, Jack, Tessie, Sophia, and Nellie, the iron doorstep mouse currently living in a box in the Dunlap's attic. Nellie liked to sneak out of the attic once in awhile and slide down the rain spout to go on outings with her friends.

Before getting started, the friends couldn't resist having a little fun. Jack, Tessie, Gilbert, Sophia, and Nellie played

a game of horseshoes, while Foo and Henrietta played on the slides and seesaw. Then, they all played hide and seek for a bit. Nellie was the best hider because she was so small, and Sophia was the best seeker because she was so tall.



When they finished their games, they set to work on the project. For the next three hours, the group raked the volleyball sand, tightened the screws on the swing set, shored up two forts, scraped gum from the back of the rock-climbing wall, and painted the poles of the pavilion.

At one point, Foo thought he saw Betherby flitting about amongst the trees in the back of the park. But when he went to look for him, the ghost was nowhere to be found.

The night turned out to be very cold, and they were well into their project before Foo realized that he had forgotten to wear his Foo Scarf. Jack and Tessie had remembered to wear their vests. Henrietta had brought her knit beanie and matching booties. Sophia was wearing a warm shawl. Nellie had brought a pullover sweater. And even though

reindeer never got cold, Gilbert was wearing his plaid muffler.



After nearly two hours of working, a Foo Cold began to take hold of Foo. *I can't believe I forgot my scarf*, he thought. *I've just been so distracted lately*. This was true. In fact, Foo was having trouble

thinking about anything other than keeping Betherby away from his block.

An hour later, as he bid his friends farewell, Foo sniffled and sneezed several times. By the time he got home, his nose was very stuffed up and he was coughing. Foo was barely able to thank the squirrels who had kept watch for him because his throat had become very sore. *Thank goodness I still have a dose of Foo Cold Serum*, Foo thought.

Foo put on his Foo Scarf and pulled a gigantic spoon out of the air to take his medicine right away.



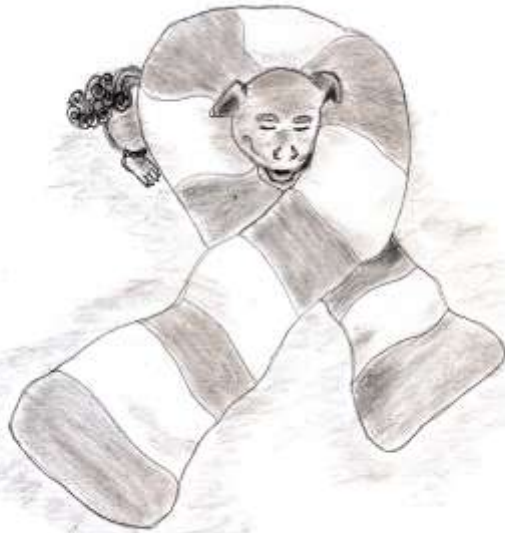
Within only a few seconds, he felt very warm and drowsy. Curling up into his fuzzy scarf, Foo quickly dropped off to sleep in his usual spot beside the steps of his house.

Chapter Five

Twelve Arms

Foo normally didn't sleep much. But the Foo Cold Serum was supposed to make foo dogs very drowsy so they could sleep off Foo Colds when they happened to catch them.

Barely an hour after he dozed off, Foo began to dream of leaping through sunny clouds. Then he dreamt of taking a swim in a warm pond. Next, he went to a carnival and ate a whole bushel of cotton candy, with a pint of salted peanuts for dessert.



In his carnival dream, Foo thought he could hear someone calling to him. “*Foo, Foo...*” But he was so sleepy and tired, he couldn’t wake up. He heard the call again a few moments later. This time, it was louder. “*Foo, Foo!*” When Foo finally shook himself awake, he realized he

wasn't hearing the word, *Foo*. Someone was saying, "*Boo!*"

It was Betherby, and he was very nearby. Just around the corner of Foo's house, outside the laundry room, the ghost was yelling, "*Boo, Boo!*" at a shimmering spirit with twelve waving arms.

The Twelve-Arm Bandit! Foo recognized the evil spirit right away.

Betherby was waving his arms too, and valiantly trying to get the bandit away from the house.

Even though Foo was still a little sluggish from his cold medicine, he sprang into action. With a tremendous *Foo Leap*, he landed directly in front of the Twelve-Arm Bandit. From the tip of his tail, Foo sent a small puff of *Foo Magic* sailing directly at the spirit. The magical puff formed a twelve-ring set of handcuffs to bind up all of the bandit's flailing arms.



Howling with anger, the evil spirit took off down the block in an orange and green blur. They lost sight of him in only a few seconds as he disappeared into the tree shadows.

“Those cuffs will hold fast for twelve days,” Foo told Betherby. “By that time, I imagine he’ll be far away from here because he won’t want to get bound up like that again.”

Though Betherby was shaking, he was very relieved that the evil bandit was gone. Slinking down in the grass to a cross-legged sitting position, the ghost told Foo, “I’m sorry I wasn’t much help. The truth is I’m not much good at scaring. I’ve never liked it, so I’ve never been any good at it.”

“Thank you for helping me,” said Foo.

“Don’t mention it,” said Betherby.

“I will mention it,” said Foo, “because I really misjudged you.”

“I’m just glad he’s gone,” said Betherby. “That bandit is a nasty piece of work.”

Foo was angry with himself. “I was so focused on driving you away,” he told Betherby, “I didn’t pay attention to what was going on around me. *Twelve things taken each time*. I can’t believe I was so dense. I’ve known about the Twelve-Arm Bandit for years. He always takes twelve things at a time. And he never tampers with doors or windows because he likes to get into houses through the clothes dryer vents in laundry rooms.”

Foo shook his head and gave a great sigh as he added, “I’m sorry I was so mean to you.”

“That’s okay,” said Betherby. “You were just doing your job.”

“But that’s just it,” said Foo, “I didn’t do my job. You basically did it for me tonight. And if I hadn’t been so fixed on keeping you away from a silly porch swing, I would have figured out that the

Twelve-Arm Bandit was in the neighborhood.”

Foo had really let himself down, and he felt very guilty about how he had treated Betherby. Clearly, Betherby was a nice ghost, who was good for the neighborhood since he was willing to help drive evil spirits away.

“C’mon,” said Foo, as he turned to head back to his usual spot by the porch steps.

Smiling, Betherby rose from the grass and floated around the corner of the house with Foo.

For the rest of the night, the two new friends played backgammon and drank hot cocoa topped with really big marshmallows.

In the morning, as Betherby was saying goodbye, Foo made sure to tell him, “Are you planning to swing some today? I hope I’ll see you later.”

With a smile that was nearly as large as Foo's, Betherby answered, "I'm going out of town to visit my brother."

"Oh," said Foo, somewhat disappointed.

"But I'll be back in a few days," Betherby told him.

"Well, I'll see you then," Foo said brightly.

"Bye now," said Betherby as he stuffed his hands into his pockets and glided across the front lawn to the sidewalk. At the end of the block, the ghost fluttered a hand at Foo, who waved back.

Chapter Six

The Stakeout

Foo very much regretted not paying better attention to what was going on in the neighborhood. As soon as he was fully over his cold, he turned his *Foo Watcher Skills* up a notch.

“Extra watchfulness is always a good idea,” Foo told Mel, who had stopped by for a visit on this early frosty morn.

“I’m better at watching now that I have eyeglasses,” Mel said. With this, he took off his spectacles and polished them on the hem of his jacket.

“Are the doorbell tricks at the Hollisters’ house still going on?” asked Foo.

“Yes,” replied Mel. “I’m totally stumped. Pinkie can see the Hollisters’ front door from her house, but she’s never seen anyone playing the tricks.”

“Well,” said Foo, “I had an idea last night. What if we set up a stakeout?”

“You mean, like the police do sometimes?” asked Mel.

“Yes,” answered Foo. “We can hide in the bushes across the street and keep watch all day.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Mel. “I can do it today if you want,” he added. “Mr. Crisp left early for a garden show and won’t be home until after dark.”

Foo was nodding. “My owners are going to be out all day too. I can meet you

by the clump of privet bushes on Gristmill Lane as soon as they leave.”

Smiling, Mel agreed and trotted off to get ready for the stakeout.

Thirty minutes later, with a thermos of coffee and a box of cinnamon sugar donuts in hand, Foo met Mel in the clump of privet bushes directly across from the Hollisters’ house. Mel had brought cucumber sandwiches, a bag of carrot sticks, and two cushions for them to sit on.



“It might be a long day,” Mel said, “so why shouldn’t we be comfortable?”

Foo couldn’t agree more, and he sighed with contentment as he plopped his bottom onto the soft cushion.

While enjoying their coffee and donuts, the two sat and watched the front door of the Hollisters’ house.

The stakeout might have been boring had it not been for a lot of interesting things happening on Gristmill Lane on this particular day. At nine o’clock, a mother passed by with her newborn twins in a double-wide stroller. This was one of their first outings, and the babies’ eyes were wide with wonder at the new sights. At ten minutes past ten, a professional dog walker walked by with six dogs. As he was turning the corner, the walker got himself pretty tangled up in the six leashes. Stopping, the dogs waited

patiently for the man to untangle himself. The postman delivered mail shortly after that, whistling as he worked.

A little while later, two women joggers, pausing to talk to each other, remarked about the changes to the playground at the park. “It’s a great mystery as to who does all of that work every year,” said one.

Her friend agreed. “Yes. No one can figure out who’s doing it. Some good soul, that’s for sure.”

In the bushes, Mel and Foo covered their mouths to smother their giggles.

At noon, while Foo and Mel were munching carrot sticks, they saw two flocks of geese heading south for the winter.

Mel had brought a seed and bulb catalog to look through, and Foo enjoyed helping his friend pick out various types of tulips and daisies.

When two o'clock rolled around, Foo and Mel had pretty much decided that they were going to have to come back on another day for another stakeout. They were just about to pack up their gear and head for home when they saw Pinkie strolling down the street. She was carrying Neil on her shoulders, as she often did when out and about with her best friend.

Mel and Foo were about to call to their friends when Pinkie suddenly turned and headed across the Hollisters' front lawn toward the porch. When she reached the front door, Pinkie rang the doorbell. Then, with a great flap of wings, she sprang from the porch and dashed away through the bushes along the side of the house, with Neil clinging tightly to her feathers as she bounced along.

“What on earth?” said Foo.

Mr. Hollister was just answering the door, and shaking his head in frustration, as Mel said, “I can’t believe it.” Shaking his own head, he added, “This is so surprising.”

Mel and Foo set off for Pinkie’s house right away. When they arrived, they found Neil and Pinkie having tea behind a stone bench in the back yard.

“We know that you are the ones playing the doorbell tricks,” said Foo.

“We saw you,” added Mel.

Pinkie looked down sheepishly, but she didn’t answer, as she slowly scraped one toe back and forth through the gravel by the bench. Neil didn’t speak either, but his face wore a very guilty expression.

“Why would do something like that?” Mel demanded.

When the pair still didn't answer, Foo sternly added, "Well? What have you to say for yourselves?"

Pinkie was about to say something when Neil interrupted her. "It's my fault," he said. "You see, it's a twisty doorbell."

Foo and Mel looked down at the tiny snail in confusion, as Pinkie continued to look sheepish and scrape her toe back and forth.

A few moments later, Neil took a deep breath and continued. "That doorbell is the only old-fashioned one in this whole neighborhood. It's the kind you twist, instead of push, and it sounds like a bicycle bell."

Foo and Mel still didn't understand, so Neil went on. "The Baxter's daughter, Teresa, used to take me with her to play when she was younger," he said. "We would go out in her bicycle for whole days

sometimes. I got to ride in the basket.” Neil smiled as he remembered the fun they used to have. “She would ring the bicycle bell, and we would fly down the street with the wind in our hair.”



Mel and Foo were starting to understand what was going on.

“But then she grew up,” Neil added, somewhat sadly. “She doesn’t ride her bicycle anymore, and she never takes me with her anyplace. One day, when I was in the Hollisters’ yard, I heard someone ring the doorbell. I hadn’t heard anything that sounded like a bicycle bell for years.”

“Neil can’t reach the doorbell,” Pinkie said. “And if he inched his way all the way up there, he would never be able to get away in time after ringing the bell. So I decided to help him.”

“It’s just been so much fun,” said Neil, “hearing that sound again. We didn’t think it was hurting anyone.”

“But why didn’t you wait to ring the bell until no one was at home?” asked Mel.

“They’re almost always there,” answered Pinkie.

“Yes,” said Neil. “The Hollisters are retired. Mrs. Hollister goes to the grocery store once a week, but her husband stays home.”

“And when Mr. Hollister goes to get a haircut,” Pinkie added, “his wife stays home.”

“Well, you can’t do it anymore,” said Foo.

Mel agreed. “Yes, doorbell tricks will eventually get you into trouble.”

Pinkie and Neil were sad, but they agreed not to ring the Hollisters’ doorbell anymore.

As Mel and Foo were heading home, Foo said, “I have an idea. Meet me at my house at midnight, if you can.”

Mel agreed and met Foo at midnight. Betherby was back from visiting his

brother, and he joined Mel and Foo on a visit to the town dump.

Together, they searched and searched until Betherby found what they were looking for—an old bicycle with a bell attached.

Mel rang the bell, which still worked perfectly, and they all smiled. It did sound a lot like the Hollisters' doorbell. Then, Foo carefully removed the bell from the bicycle.

Neil was surprised to have late-night visitors to his koi pond. And the tiny snail was speechless as Mel presented him with his very own working bicycle bell.

Foo, Mel, and Betherby left about an hour later, after helping Neil find a perfect hidden spot for his bell, under the slate rock ledge surrounding the pond. And as the friends headed down the block, they

faintly heard the bell as Neil rang himself
off to sleep.

