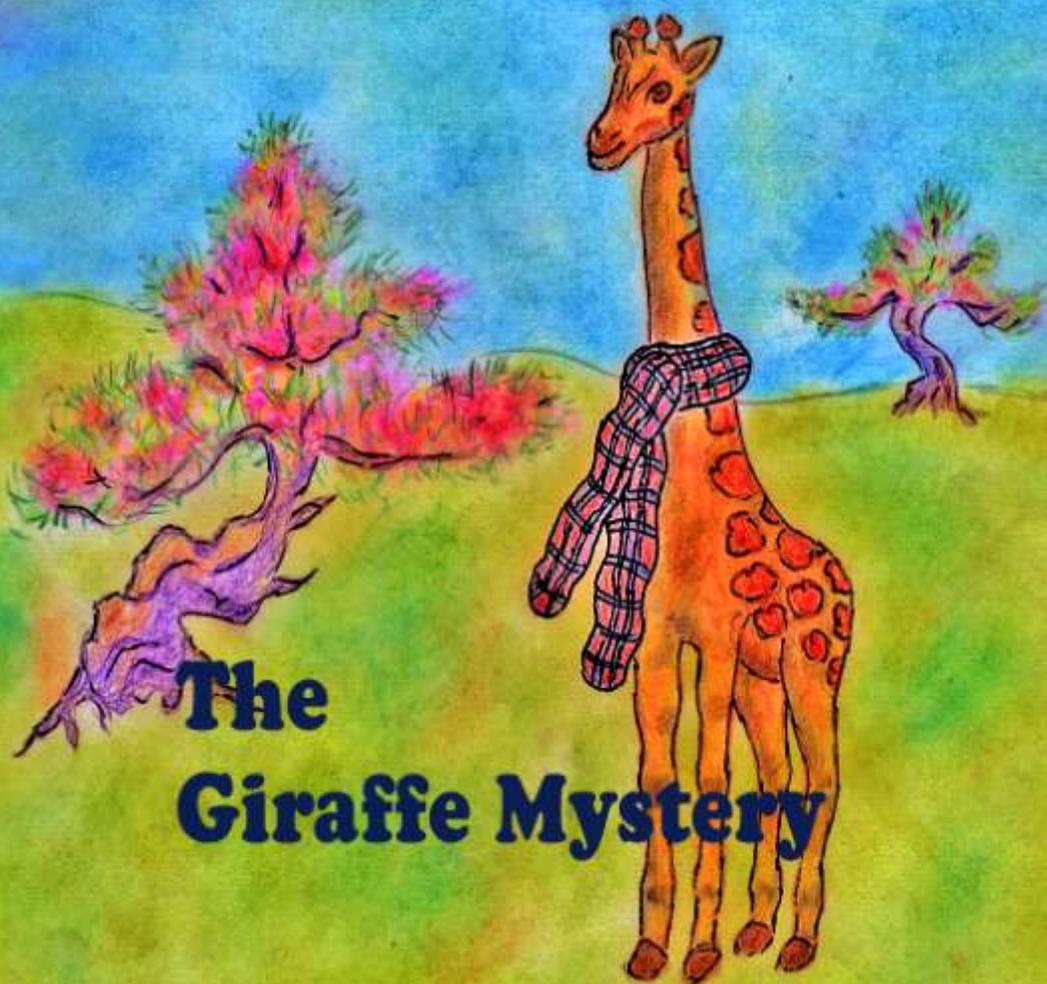


Foo and Friends



The Giraffe Mystery

J.H. Sweet

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To caring for our friends

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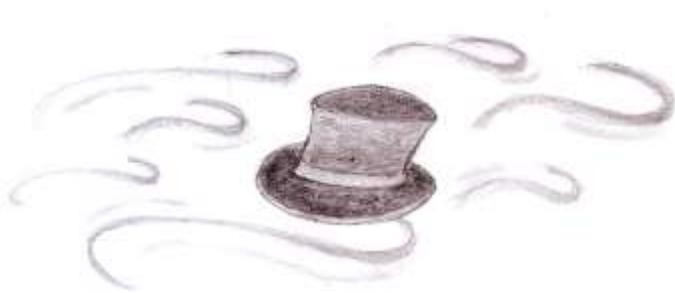
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Chapter One

The New Bronze

Late spring had not quite turned to summer when Foo received a visit from his friends, Pinkie and Neil. The day was somewhat cool and quite windy, and the friends hunkered down in the bushes by the steps of Foo's house. Though the wind was mussing Pinkie's feathers and tangling Foo's tail curls, the friends enjoyed the mild weather.

As Foo served hot cocoa and cinnamon ladyfingers to his guests, a strong gust of wind brought an object bouncing along the sidewalk in front of the house. It was a top hat. The hat was doing a fantastic dance as it spun and flipped its way down the walk. A mere moment after the hat passed, a man dressed in a tuxedo came flying by in pursuit of the hat.



“Well, that’s a sight you don’t see every day,” said Foo.

“No, just once a year,” answered Neil. “That’s Mr. Ellis. He dresses up like that once a year, and he goes away for two days.”

The friends wanted to help Mr. Ellis catch his hat. But, of course, they couldn’t. Lawn and garden ornaments like plastic flamingos and ceramic foo dogs couldn’t very well go chasing about directly under the noses, and eyes, of people.

“No one knows where he goes,” Neil added. “It’s all a big mystery.”

As the friends watched, Mr. Ellis finally caught up to his hat. Fitting it securely to his head, he turned about and began fighting the wind to get back to his car, which was parked down the street in front of his house.

“Do you want to know where he goes each year?” Foo suddenly asked Neil.

“Sure,” answered Neil, though he wasn’t sure as to what Foo might be about to suggest.

“Quick,” said Foo, bending down. “Climb onto my head.”

As quick as any stone snail could, Neil did just that.

Pinkie followed along as Foo bounded down the street to deposit Neil in a secure spot on Mr. Ellis’ back bumper, right next to the license plate.

Neil, excited about going on an adventure, waved to his friends as Mr. Ellis drove away.

Pinkie and Foo next headed back to Foo's house to finish their cocoa and ladyfingers.

Mel shortly arrived, holding tight to his own hat. The garden gnome had some exciting news. As Foo served him cocoa and ladyfingers, Mel told his friends, "There's a new statue in Spence's yard, and it's a bronze sculpture too."

"Really?" said Foo.

"How exciting!" Pinkie exclaimed.

"It's a giraffe," Mel said. "And he's way taller than Spence. Of course, a giraffe would be taller than a gorilla."

"I bet Spence is thrilled," Pinkie said. "He'll be so glad to have the company."

"Yes," Mel answered. "Company will be good for him since he can't get out as often as the rest of us."

"The giraffe won't be able to get out much either," said Foo. "They're both just too big to be wandering around a lot." Unless Foo went to visit Spence, he usually only saw his friend late at night, when it was safe for the gigantic bronze gorilla to stretch his legs around the neighborhood.

"Bronze is so expensive," Pinkie said, shaking her head. "I wonder why people don't use something cheaper, like wood, for statues."

"People like to have variety," said Mel.

"Yes," answered Foo. "I like variety too. Foo dogs come in many varieties, and I wouldn't want them all to be made out of ceramic, like me. Let's see..." Foo added, "there are iron foos, marble foos, wooden foos,

alabaster foos, glass foos, terra cotta foos...and I once knew a pair of bronze bookend foos.”

“I see what you mean,” Pinkie said. “I like being made of plastic. I’m light and it’s easy to get around, especially when flying.”

“Gnomes are sometimes made out of different things too, like wood and concrete,” Mel said. “But I like being ceramic.”

“Me too,” said Foo.

Mel and Foo both grinned ear-to-ear to discover they had so much in common. No wonder they had become best friends.

The group was just finishing up their cocoa and ladyfingers when Spence came lumbering around the side of the house. His friends were very surprised to see him out and about in the daytime. Doing his best to hide behind a large pittosporum bush, Spence urgently motioned his friends to join him.

As they were getting settled in behind the bush, Gilbert joined them. The wire reindeer looked quite different today because he was sporting a huge lilac ribbon bow around his neck. As his friends stared at him, Gilbert explained. “Mrs. Shipley’s daughter is getting married in the backyard gazebo this afternoon. But instead of moving all of her Christmas ornaments, Mrs. Shipley just decorated us up for the wedding.” Gilbert proudly fluffed then smoothed the ribbon bow as he said this.



After admiring Gilbert's bow, Spence told his friends something very surprising. "There's something wrong with the new giraffe. He's all quiet and still."

"What exactly do you mean?" Mel asked.

"He won't move," Spence said. "He's never moved since they unpacked him from the crate. And he won't answer me when I talk to him."

"That is very strange," said Foo.

"It's like he's just not there," said Spence. "He's all cold and...missing. That's the best way I can describe it."

"Maybe he just needs time to warm up to his new home," suggested Mel. "Then he'll start moving around, and talking."

"That could be, I guess," said Spence.

Gilbert couldn't stay any longer because he needed to be getting home to be in his proper spot for the wedding.

Spence also needed to be getting back. Mr. Spickley had only gone to the grocery store and would be returning shortly. Spence's owner certainly did not need to come home to a missing bronze statue.

Pinkie and Mel left for their homes shortly after Spence.

Foo sat pondering the mystery of the still and quiet giraffe for some time after his friends left. This was certainly strange.

Chapter Two

Tickles, Glints, and Fire Hydrants

Spence was trying very hard not to laugh. He had to struggle like this every time Mr. Spickley polished him because the polishing really tickled. But no matter how much it tickled, he had to keep a straight face and resist the urge to curl up and burst into a fit of chuckles.

When Mr. Spickley finished polishing Spence, he began polishing the new giraffe. He had brought a step ladder for this very purpose so he could reach the giraffe's neck and head. Mr. Spickley usually didn't bring a step ladder to polish Spence because he could reach all the way to the top of his head, though just barely.

Out of the corner of his eye, Spence watched the giraffe closely as Mr. Spickley polished with his polishing cream and big towel. The giraffe never moved; but at one point, when Mr. Spickley was polishing behind his ears, Spence thought he saw a small glint in the left eye of the giraffe.

When Mr. Spickley went back up to the house, Spence snuck over to the giraffe to have a closer look. Though shiny from the polishing, the giraffe's eyes never glinted. Spence next tried gently knocking on

the statue, but nothing happened. He never moved and there was no sign of life. The giraffe remained as cold and still as a regular lump of bronze would be if placed outside on a cool and windy day.



I probably imagined the glint, Spence thought as he sidled back to his usual spot.

The sun hid behind clouds for much of the day; however, it decided to show itself late in the afternoon. As it peeked out and shone upon Spence's yard, he noticed something glinting on the ground near a hedge close to the house. Making sure the coast was clear, he

snuck over to the spot to pick up the object, which turned out to be a fancy dog tag with letters and numbers. Spence could make out the name, George, but he didn't know what all the numbers meant.

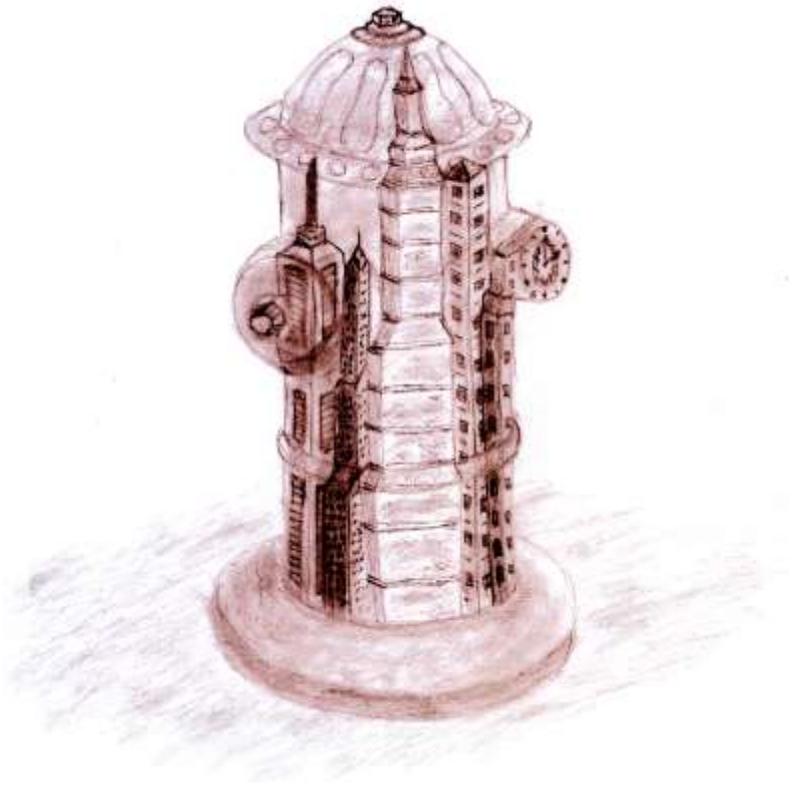
Spence didn't know what to do with the tag, other than keep it safe. And he didn't feel like worrying about it too much because he had made special plans for the evening.

Just as the sun was setting, Foo arrived. After Foo had time to admire the giraffe, who stayed cold and quiet, the pair set off to pick up Mel in Mr. Crisp's garden. After enjoying a snack of baby white radishes and tender okra fresh from the garden, the three friends set off on a tour of some special items in the neighborhood.

The townspeople had recently begun painting artwork on some of the fire hydrants in the area. On Mel's block, the friends stopped to view hydrants painted to look like a Dalmatian dog, an oversized pinecone, and a huge goldfish.

The stone collies, Jack and Tessie, joined the group on the next block. They were also out taking a tour to admire the fancy fireplugs.

"People are so creative," gushed Tessie, as she rubbed her side up against a hydrant painted to look like a grouping of skyscrapers.



“Yes, they are,” Foo agreed.

The group next discovered a hydrant sporting a pair of cowboy boots tucked into a blooming prickly pear cactus. At the end of the street, they found a fancy clock whose hands were painted in at exactly ten minutes after three.

The next block had a hydrant painted like a dragon, along with ones done up to look just like Charlie Brown and Snoopy. These turned out to be everyone’s favorites.

Pinkie's block contained three hydrants as well. The first one they came to looked just like Uncle Sam. The next was painted up as a huge vase overflowing with daffodils and lilies. When they reached Pinkie's house, they found her thrilled to pieces over the fireplug in front of her lawn. Even though it was only halfway finished, it was already looking like a pink flamingo with a string of Shasta daisies around her neck. Pinkie herself was being used as the model for this artwork. She had posed nearly two hours in the afternoon for the college student who was transferring her lovely pink and feathery image to the fire hydrant. All the student would need to do the next day was finish her bottom half.

After visiting for awhile, the friends happily made their way to their homes, having enjoyed their tour very much.

Chapter Three

Get Your Plaid On

Early the next morning, Foo set off to have tea with Pinkie in her side yard. He thought she might be lonely since Neil was gone and the two usually had tea together every day. Along with raspberry tea, Pinkie and Foo enjoyed huckleberry scones and chocolate cream puffs.

While they enjoyed their teatime, they talked about the new giraffe, and Pinkie told Foo, “I knew a plastic flamingo once that was all still and quiet. It’s like she was sleeping and couldn’t wake up. I could never figure that one out. When the family moved, they just donated her to a charity thrift shop.”

Just then, Neil returned from his trip. He had hitched a ride back on another car. “I found out where Mr. Ellis goes every year,” he said excitedly. “He is Master of Ceremonies at the annual dog show in the Convention Center downtown. They set up yesterday, and the show is today. But Mr. Ellis had to be dressed up in his tuxedo for both days to meet a lot of important people, and dogs. He stayed last night at a hotel next to the Convention Center. And I stayed in a pet carrier with a nice dachshund named Clarissa who let me share her blanket.”

Spence arrived next at the tea party with some important news of his own. “Mr. Spickley’s nephew, Kevin, is visiting him and has brought four dogs with him—terriers. But they are not *just* terriers, they’re West Highland White Terriers, with papers and extra special fancy dog tags. I found one of the tags in the yard.”

“Are they going to the dog show at the Convention Center?” Neil shrewdly asked.

“As a matter of fact, they are,” Spence replied. “Mr. Spickley thinks Ned and Nancy have excellent chances to place or show. But he doesn’t think Bess or George will do as well.”

Spence laughed as he told his friends, “The terriers all have these little plaid vests to wear because it’s so breezy and cool.”



Gilbert loped up to the gathering next to give them a full report of the lovely wedding from the previous day. “It was all lilac and lemon-yellow in theme,” he said.

The friends were full of sighs and big eyes as Gilbert further described the flowers, the doves, the giant lemon cake, and the lilac-flavored petit fours. “And Mrs. Shipley is leaving the bow on me until the first day of summer,” Gilbert said, twirling around so everyone could again admire his decoration.

However, there wasn’t much time for admiring because the friends all needed to hide from someone coming down the street. It was none other than Kevin, who was out walking the four terriers.

As his friends took cover in the bushes, Spence hid behind a garden shed.

“Oh no,” whispered Pinkie, as Kevin stopped in the middle of the block beside the fireplug painted to look like a vase of flowers.

“Double no,” said Mel, crinkling his nose.

He was right. Two of the dogs were admiring the vase of lilies and daffodils in quite a different way than the friends had the night before.

“Oh well...” said Foo, with a small smile. “It will eventually get rained on and washed off.”

“Let’s hope sooner, rather than later,” Neil said.

To Pinkie’s relief, the terriers didn’t give the fireplug in front of her house the same attention.

As Kevin and the dogs moved on to the next block, Spence rejoined his friends, and they were again able to enjoy their teatime together.

The plaid vests of the terriers had given Gilbert a good idea. (Gilbert often had good ideas, and he loved to share them.)

“Those vests got me thinking about my plaid scarf,” he told his friends. “What if we give it to the giraffe? It would help warm him up, and it might make him feel special. This bow certainly makes me feel special.” (Gilbert twirled again.) “And I have another scarf to use when the cold weather comes.”

“That’s a really good idea,” said Foo.

“Thank you,” said Gilbert.

When their tea was finished, as discretely as possible, the friends all headed to Gilbert’s house to get the scarf.

Chapter Four

An Answer to the Mystery

Gilbert's plaid scarf was stowed in a special spot under the gazebo. As soon as he had retrieved it, the friends set off for Spence's house.

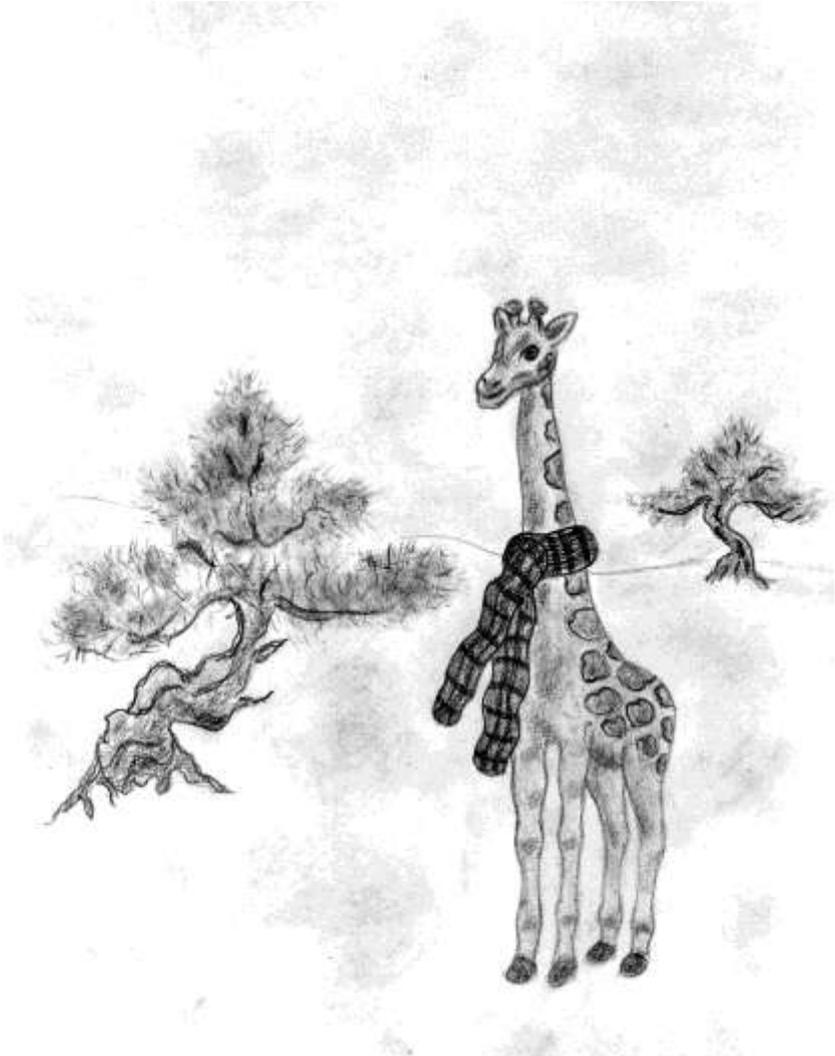
The front lawns upon which Spence and the giraffe were placed had high hedges on either side to separate the property from the neighbors' lawns. The hedges provided good seclusion; and the friends only had to keep watch for people passing on the street, which was fairly quiet on this day.

As Gilbert handed him the scarf, Spence lumbered up to the giraffe, rising on his tippy-toes to wrap the scarf around the giraffe's neck. Pulling gently on the ends to make it secure, but not too tight, Spence said, "Please, come out of your shell and talk to me." Spence gave the giraffe a pat as he stepped back.

At first, nothing happened. Then it seemed the scarf came to life with a small leap, as though it had been caught in a stiff wind. But there was no wind. When the scarf settled back into place, Spence noticed that the eyes of the giraffe now looked quite different. They were glowing, and looked very alive. And the giraffe's mouth now held a small smile that had been missing before.

“Hello,” Spence said, somewhat tentatively.

With a larger smile, the giraffe finally spoke. “Hi. I’m Basil.”



Spence quickly introduced himself and all of his friends.

“We’ve all been looking forward to meeting you,” Spence went on, “and Gilbert thought you might like a scarf.”

“It is a very nice scarf,” Basil replied. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” said Gilbert.

“I never had a scarf before,” the giraffe said, “but I used to have a blanket. The boy who used to climb on me would put a blanket on my back in the winter. It was a very nice blanket.”

“We could probably get a blanket for you too,” Pinkie offered, “if you want one.”

“No, the scarf is plenty,” Basil answered. “But thank you anyway. I didn’t know anybody cared.”

“Is that why you kept quiet for so long?” Foo asked.

“Because you didn’t think anybody cared?” added Neil.

“I didn’t really think about it,” Basil said. “It’s more like I just felt too heavy to move or talk. I didn’t used to feel heavy, but I started to feel like that when the family where I used to live moved away. The boy who played in the yard didn’t come to climb on me anymore, or clean off mud splatters from the rain.”

“No wonder you went quiet,” said Neil. “I would feel horrible if Mrs. Baxter moved and forgot to take me with her.”

“If she moved and couldn’t take you with her,” Pinkie said, “she would make sure someone cared for the koi pond, and you. She would pick just the right person for that, someone who liked koi fish and stone snails.”

“I think we just figured out what was wrong,” Foo said to Basil. “You felt heavy, and went all still and quiet, because it seemed like no one cared for you.”

“I really missed the boy too,” Basil said quietly. “I thought I might have done something to make him go away. Then I got knocked over somehow. I don’t remember much else before I wound up here. I still felt heavy, except for one time when I felt like someone was tickling me. But it didn’t occur to me to speak until I felt the scarf and heard Spence’s voice.”

“Since you thought no one cared for you,” Foo said again, “you just kind of withdrew.”

“Well, Mr. Spickley definitely cares for you,” Spence told Basil. “He paid over three thousand dollars for you. That’s way more than he spent on me.”

Basil didn’t know what to say to Spence. The other friends also kept quiet.

“And he spends more time polishing you than he does me,” Spence went on. “I have to admit, I’m a little jealous.”

“But that’s probably because I’m taller. I take longer to polish up,” Basil replied. “He can’t possibly like me more than he likes you.”

After a long pause, Spence said, “Well...I guess he might like us in an equal kind of way.”

“Yes,” said Basil. “I think he likes us both the same.”

And from that point on, Basil was no longer still and quiet; and he never felt heavy again.

When Foo and Spence were next alone together on one of their midnight strolls around the neighborhood, Foo said, “Mr. Spickley has had you for over twenty years. You *do* know that bronze used to cost less, and that’s why he paid less for you.”

“Yes, I know that,” Spence said. “But Basil doesn’t need to know that.”

“You’re right,” agreed Foo, smiling at his friend.

Chapter Five

The Boy

Three days after he woke up to his plaid scarf and new friends, Basil got a wonderful surprise. The boy who used to climb on him came for a visit. His name was Andrew, and he was Kevin's friend.

Mel was very good at keeping up with all of the goings-on in the neighborhood. On a visit to Foo's house the next morning, Mel was just starting to give Foo a full report of Andrew's visit when Pinkie and Neil showed up. So he started over.

"As it turns out, Kevin and Andrew went to school together. When Andrew's family had to move, Kevin talked to his uncle about getting the statue. Andrew's parents made a special visit ahead of time to check out Mr. Spickley's yard," Mel went on. "They wanted to make sure Basil would have a good home before they agreed to give him away. They didn't ask for any money for him, but Mr. Spickley wanted to pay them. So he gave them what he could afford, and he paid to have the statue moved. According to Andrew," Mel added, "the money really helped them get moved into their new home. But they don't have a yard, which is why they couldn't take Basil with them."

Since this was the beginning of their summer break from school, Andrew was staying with Kevin at his uncle's house for a week. Many of the neighborhood friends saw the boys out walking the terriers several times over the next few days.

Andrew also spent a lot of time with Basil, and he told the giraffe how much he missed him. He also took pictures of Basil and promised to come back as often as possible to visit. Andrew was especially planning to bring Basil a blanket before winter.

The fire hydrants on Spence and Basil's street had not yet been painted. On one afternoon of the boys' visit, Mr. Spickley took Kevin and Andrew shopping for paint, brushes, and other supplies. The next morning, which was spectacularly sunny, the boys painted one hydrant to look just like a gorilla. In the afternoon, they worked on another one and came up with a beautiful picture of a giraffe.

Spence and Basil were very pleased to have their likenesses transferred to the fireplugs.

Since no one in the neighborhood had yet painted hydrants to look like gnomes or foo dogs, Mel and Foo had to admit they were slightly jealous of Spence, Basil, and Pinkie. But they were also very happy for them.



Chapter Six

Two Parties

On the last day of Andrew's visit, Mr. Spickley hosted a Saturday afternoon block party at his house. But practically the whole neighborhood was coming, not just people from his block. And this was the first time ever for the neighborhood to have such a large friendly get-together.

Pinkie, Neil, Foo, and Mel snuck over and hid in the hedge bushes to watch the people play croquet and badminton. They also had lawn bowling, a tarot card reader, a balloon artist, and other such amusements. Most people were asking the balloon artist to make gorilla and giraffe balloons.

"Oh, look!" Pinkie practically squealed. "They've got one of those jumpy-bouncy castles."

From his position, Foo could see Anton and Sophia, the neighborhood gargoyle and garden angel, hidden in the hedge on the far side of the lawn. They were enjoying watching the fun as well.

Mr. Spickley always kept some upturned apple crates and bushel baskets under his trees for people to sit on. He pulled a few of them over to the gorilla and giraffe so that the neighborhood kids could climb on his statues. Even though Spence and Basil were not

moving, their friends could tell the two were having a blast by their expressions.

The terriers also seemed to be having a good time, running in circles and basically going berserk playing with other neighborhood pets also attending the party.



Foo, Mel, Pinkie, and Neil couldn't stay all afternoon to watch as they might have liked because they needed to be getting to Gilbert's house to help him plan for another celebration.

The friends were having a gazebo party the very same night. Jack and Tessie had planned the party in honor of the four visiting dogs. Since the terriers were staying for the whole summer, the collies wanted to make sure Ned, Nancy, Bess, and George felt

welcome. Bess had also surprised everyone by placing in the dog show. Since she was the only one of the terriers to win a ribbon, the party was partly in celebration of this.



A congratulations banner had already been made, and the decorations were going up when Foo and his group arrived. Anton and Sophia came early too, to help set up.

Many other friends arrived over the next few hours to bring food and help set up.

Spence and Basil, with the terriers in tow, arrived rather late because they had had to wait until their other party was completely finished.

The celebration was merry, and the refreshments were very elaborate. The friends enjoyed a spread of

pimento cheese sandwiches, mashed potato icebox cookies, six-bean salad, cucumber pasta supreme, rainbow sherbet floats, strawberry bonbons, and mandarin orange mango cake. They also had bark-bark biscuits, pup pies, and growly-rowdy chewies for the special guests.

Spence and Basil got to tell all about the other party and, in particular, how much fun it was to have kids climbing all over them. They both felt very special to have been able to attend both parties.

It seemed Basil was settling into his new home well. Even before the block party, several neighbors had stopped by to admire the new statue.

Pinkie was very quiet during the party, and Foo noticed that she looked somewhat sad. “What’s wrong,” he asked her.

“I was just thinking about that quiet flamingo,” she said. “Evidently, no one cared for her.”

“But you said they gave her to a charity thrift shop,” Foo said. “So she’s probably in a much better home now.”

“You think, maybe?” said Pinkie.

“Oh, definitely,” answered Foo. “If her spirit withdrew, like Basil’s did, she probably just needed someone to care for her in order to wake up. And people who buy things at charity thrift shops definitely care for those things. She probably lives in a beautiful garden with lots of flowers. And I bet she has plenty of friends because the people who own the garden put statues like gnomes and rabbits in it.”



“I think you’re right,” Pinkie said. And she felt much better thinking about the flamingo going to a better home.

Nearing the end of the party, the friends watched as Nancy, Ned, Bess, and George paid a visit to a fire hydrant across the street. This one was painted to look like a jar of pickles, and the terriers spent a great deal of time admiring it.

Shaking his head, Gilbert said, “I wonder why dogs like to pee on fire hydrants.”

Jack and Tessie were particularly puzzled since neither of them ever peed on anything.

“That’s just one of life’s little mysteries,” Foo said.

But unlike the mystery involving Mr. Ellis and his tuxedo, or the withdrawn giraffe, the friends probably wouldn’t be able to figure this one out.

About the Author

J.H. Sweet is the author of *The Fairy Chronicles*, *Foo and Friends*, *The Time Entity Trilogy*, *Juan Noel's Crystal Airship*, *Cassie Kingston Mysteries*, and *The Heaviest Things*. She lives in South Texas and has a degree in English from Texas State University.

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