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Whatever happened to Dorothy Snot

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A caterpillar vanishes

That morning, the news was at once all over the forest:
“Miss Dorothy Snot disappeared!”

Before you knew it, everyone was talking about it. And it was normal- Dorothy Snot was the richest and dearest caterpillar of the forest.

Her house was a huge oak tree with two thousand acorns. And her house was so big because she was very rich, so rich, that she could buy a hundred oak trees. But she didn't need them, since she didn't fancy acorns - they didn't agree very well with her stomach. Instead, she gave them away to the squirrels and ferrets of the wood, and she did the same thing with the little flowers. Because acorns, before they became acorns, they started out as little flowers, and these Dorothy Snot plucked and made a gift to the bees. She only kept for herself some tiny green leaves, because over the past year she had put on some weight and was on a diet.

So, her being so nice and giving away her things to all the animals of the forest, Dorothy was loved by all and everyone spoke fondly about her.

No one said, for example: “That caterpillar is so rich!” or “Why should she live in such a big house?” No one was jealous of her, because she was generous, and always said: “What is mine, is yours as well,” and then, every Saturday night, she threw the craziest parties at the penthouse of her oak tree, where everyone was invited, even the bears who had to hang from the branches and made a terrible fuss each time they switched places or had to go to the loo. Ah, Dorothy Snot's parties had it all! Munchies, drinks! Being so rich, she ordered the most exotic treats from all around the forest- rabbit milk cheesecakes, pancakes with violet syrup, and chilled rose-nectar.

That's why everyone was so upset that morning, when Fly FM announced that Dorothy, their favourite caterpillar, had disappeared. The flies, who could fly anywhere, knew what they were talking about. They had reporters flying all over the forest, and were the first to know what was going on. So, the minute they realized that Miss Snot hadn't come out to her balcony to water her azaleas, they started spreading the news around the forest, bringing tears to the eyes of the most sensitive. It didn't have to do with the parties; the animals loved her, and soon they started worrying.

“What could have happened to her?” they asked.

“Maybe she went on a trip abroad,” said the badger.

“What are you talking about? She would have called me!” said miss mouse. “We had plans for this afternoon-I was going over to her place for a game of checkers. She'd never take off like that, without calling me first!”

“That's right!” said the fox. “And I had also promised to drop by this morning and help her with the dusting. It's so big for her, poor thing, and so I go in with my big tail, and swish! I dust the whole tree at once!”

At the same moment, amongst the animals that were talking and shouting, the sparrow, the forest mailman, came down flying. His bag was still hanging from his right wing, and he seemed frightfully upset.

“It’s terrible!” he said over and over again, “It’s absolutely terrible!”

The animals gathered around him at once. “What? What is it? What’d you see?” they asked. And he said, after a deep breath:

“Every morning I take the papers and the magazines to Dorothy Snot’s oak tree, just like any other tree, that is. What’s more, since she fancies reading the fashion section first thing in the morning, whilst drinking her tea, she’s asked me to drop them on the ledge of her bedroom window.”

“So what?” they shouted all together.

“So,” said the sparrow, “instead of getting up from her bed to bid me good morning, like any other day, today the lights were all turned off in Miss Snot’s bedroom. I thought she might be sleeping, and so I pushed the window open very quietly, so as not to wake her up. And then, as soon as the sunlight came in, what do you think I saw?”

“What? What?” everybody asked; that is, everybody except Miss mouse, who couldn’t take the suspense and had passed out. Mister mouse helped her up, so she ran next to the finch too, and started shouting “What did you see? Do tell!”

“Her bed was empty, but her nightgown was there!” said the sparrow.

Everyone was so scared, that for a while nobody said a thing. It was the badger who spoke first.

“It was...there? Her nightgown was there?”

“That’s right,” replied the sparrow.

“Was it her fancy nightgown, the blue one, with the red and orange stripes?” asked the fox, quite upset.

“Nah,” said Miss mouse, “couldn’t be! Not with this weather! It must’ve been her white nightgown, you know, the one with the golden lace, the one she wears in the wintertime. The blue one, she’d catch her death-”

“It doesn’t matter which one it was!” shouted the sparrow at the top of his voice. “The point is I was worried, and I started calling her name. I thought she might be taking a bath, or maybe she’d gone down to the kitchen. I flew into every hollow of her oak, shouting her name, but she was nowhere. And then I thought: maybe Miss Snot didn’t leave the house on her own!”

“What then? What could’ve happened? Who could’ve been with her?” Everyone was talking at once. The sparrow shook his head.

“Can’t say,” he said with a sigh. “But what if something happened to her? Something bad?”

The very thought was too much for Miss mouse, who had fainted once more.

Indeed, it was out of question; who would want to harm such an adorable caterpillar like Dorothy Snot?

“And what sort of bad thing could have happened to her?” This time it was a wildcat that had spoken, but she was so upset, that all her hair stood up so that she looked like a bush. Miss mouse, who had just recovered, saw her, screamed: “God Almighty! It’s a talking bush!” and fainted for the third time in a row. This time they had to call the doctor, there was an awful fuss.

In the meantime though this new gossip had begun to spread. Dorothy Snot hadn’t disappeared, they said. Someone had kidnapped her.

“Who? Who could do such a thing?” they asked one another.

“Some dirty scoundrel, that’s for sure!” shouted an old bug, raging with anger and buzzing like mad: “Buzzz! Buzzzzz!” he shouted, “Let me get all six hands on him,

lousy kidnapper, and he'll be sorry he was born!" Everyone knew of course that this old bug was very fond of Miss Snot, some even suggested that he might have been secretly in love with her.

All of a sudden, the owl spoke, from the top of a tree. "It's no use, making wild guesses," she said. The owl was the smartest animal of the forest, and what was more, she could turn her head all the way around, which made all other animals respect her awfully much. No matter how they tried, they couldn't turn their heads around like that; they only got stiff necks. "Hoo! Hear me!" she said again, waving her wings, "the only one who can tell us what really happened to Dorothy Snot is...is...Hatch!" and she suddenly shook violently, almost falling off her branch. Tears were running down her eyes.

"Hatch? Who is this Hatch?" asked Miss Mouse, worried.

"There's no Hatch, I just happened to sneeze, that's all!" said the owl, wiping her beak. "Some pollen got into my nostrils, no big deal. I meant to say that we urgently need the help of Cornelius Crick."

2

Cornelius Crick, the famous detective

Cornelius Crick was a squirrel who lived at the opposite end of the forest. His home was an old linden. No one really knew how old he was—some said he was young and merely looked old, and others claimed that he *was* actually old, and that he dyed his sideburns to look younger.

However, everyone agreed on one point: that he was the brightest and foxiest squirrel in the whole wide forest. And that, whenever they faced a mystery they couldn't solve, the only one who could help them was Cornelius Crick. He was their own private detective.

During an interview on Fly FM, a couple of years ago, Cornelius had accepted the fact that he had been the key-squirrel in the solving of many a puzzling case, in many forests all over the world. It was he who had discovered the lost jewels of a Siamese cat in the forest of Boulogne, and he had also unmasked the notorious blueberry thief, a case that had greatly upset the animals of Hyde Park the previous autumn.

In every case, Cornelius Crick occupied as his personal assistant his devoted friend Martha, an exceptional firefly, who possessed a great talent at guessing the culprit each time. However, above all else, Cornelius was a good detective because he spent most of his time at home, reading books. He loved to learn. To him, it was like going to some party all by himself. Sitting in his armchair, wearing his slippers, he read his books and had a great time.

So it was only natural that he wasn't acquainted with Dorothy Snot, since he hadn't been at any of her famous parties. He only knew her as a very rich caterpillar, who sent him a sack of acorns every Christmas and every Easter. To thank her, he always sent her one of his favourite books in return. There was no chance that he might run out of them; Cornelius owned as many books as Dorothy owned acorns.

And that very morning, when Dorothy Snot disappeared, the general upheaval hadn't even crossed his mind. He hadn't listened to the morning news on the radio, nor had he read his newspaper. He had turned on the lamp next to his bed, and he started

reading at once the book that he had been reading the night before, before he fell asleep. He was on the last chapter, and he was very anxious to find out how it ended.

However, Martha, his faithful firefly, was very upset, from the moment she had woken up. She said that she had a bad feeling, and every now and then she flickered nervously, mumbling:

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Something bad’s going to happen today! I can feel it! Oh, dear!”

We have to say that, although Martha was an exceptional assistant, she had a tiny weakness: she was a bit chatty, like most fireflies are. And Cornelius, who was trying to concentrate on his book, began to be annoyed.

“Don’t flicker all the time, Martha dear,” he told her, “it feels as though the pages of my book are burning, the way they glow all of a sudden!”

“Oh, dear! It’s not my fault!” she said, “I’ve got a bad feeling! My oh my!” And she flew around her miniature glass cottage.

“Would you like a thimbleful of hot milk?” asked Cornelius, hoping that this would bring her sleep.

“Ah! No, thanks!” she replied, “No, thanks! But can you please tell me if you have the same bad feeling too? Because I have it all the time! Oh, dear!”

Cornelius tried very hard not to get mad.

“Dearest Martha,” he said, speaking in a gentle tone, “There’s no reason to worry beforehand about something that may happen in the future. If and when it does happen, we’ll handle it.”

Cornelius was right. No one should worry about tomorrow. Today is always more fun. But the strange thing was that, on the morning in question, Martha was also right. Because as they were having this conversation, someone knocked on the shutter; someone who seemed to be in a hurry. And when Cornelius opened in the window, in flew a finch, who told him, with all sorts of *‘twee’s* and *‘tilly-loo’s* what had happened: that Dorothy Snot had disappeared, and that the animals thought that someone had kidnapped her.

“This is very serious,” Cornelius muttered, “very serious indeed,” and he started pacing to and fro in his bedroom. He had left his book unfinished. Friends are more important than books, and Dorothy Snot, even without taking in mind the acorns, was a dear friend. He had to help her, along with all the animals of the forest who trusted him and thought so high of him.

So, not wasting any time, he told the finch that he would take on the case. Then he asked her if she could fly over at the snakes’ nests and ask for Olivia, a tiny red viper who was a fingerprint specialist. First of all, they had to know whether someone had been inside Dorothy’s house. He also asked her to gather the witnesses, that is the animals who had last seen Dorothy before she disappeared.

The finch took off, to spread the good news, whilst Cornelius opened his wardrobe to choose something proper for the occasion. He decided to wear his red checkered suit, a fine black cape and his fur hat. It was chilly this morning. From his bedside drawer he took his magnifying glass, and his note-book, along with a pencil. Then he walked over to Martha’s miniature parlour and told her to get dressed.

But she’d been ready for quite a while. She had worn her red fur coat, and was flying around inside the glass lantern that Cornelius used whenever he took her out.

“Come on!” she buzzed. “What’s taken you so long? The animals are waiting for us to begin with the investigation, it’s not right to dawdle!”

She was so excited that she smiled and her tail flickered incessantly, which made her fur light up with an orange glow, like some Christmas lamp.

“Your enthusiasm utterly baffles me, dear Martha,” Cornelius said, “It was you that worried less than an hour ago, was it not?”

“Yes,” she replied with a smile, “but now that my bad feeling has turned out to be right, I have no reason to worry anymore!” And then she started shouting: “Come on! Let’s go! For goodness’s sake, let’s get going!”

It was always like this when they had a case to solve; Cornelius stopped talking, because all the time he would be thinking: Who could be the guilty, what had made him do the thing he did, and this sort of thing. However Martha, maybe because she loved snooping around the homes of other animals, could not keep her mouth shut for one minute during the investigation. And that morning in particular, as they were heading towards Dorothy’s oak tree, which was known to be unique in size and luxury, Martha was having a ball. She was moving all the time inside her lantern, and interrupted Cornelius’s thinking with a whole lot of questions.

“Why do you think anyone would kidnap her, Nealy?” ‘Nealy’ was Cornelius’s pet name, though he wasn’t very fond of it.

“Hmm-what?” He hadn’t heard what she had said, because he had been thinking about the case.

“Nothing,” said Martha, “it just seems strange-why would anyone kidnap Dorothy Snot?” And, with a tinge of jealousy: “Or *any* caterpillar, for that matter! A firefly, sure, I could dig that, but a *caterpillar*?”

“What are you talking about?” he replied, “Dorothy’s worth zillions!”

“Then why should anyone take *her*, instead of her money? What do you think about that, Nealy?”

Cornelius was running out of patience, but he replied nonetheless.

“Most of her money isn’t kept around here. She has investments in pines, in Switzerland.” And he went on with his musings.

It was not meant to last, though. With a timid little voice, Martha asked:

“How far away is Switzerland?”

Cornelius couldn’t take it anymore. He started yelling.

“For the love of God, Martha, dear! You are driving me insane with your babbling! What’s the matter with you today?”

She must have felt a bit ashamed for herself, because for a moment there she stopped talking altogether. But before long, she took a deep breath and lighting her tail she whined:

“But if I don’t know the facts of the case, how can we solve it?”

3

The mystery house with no prints

When they arrived at the front gate of Dorothy’s huge oak tree, the rest of the team was waiting for them, gathered by the roots. According to Cornelius’s instructions, Olivia the viper was there, with her shiny belly ready for the fingerprints. Next to her flew Jeffery the colibri, who, with his pointed beak could open any lock-Jeffery was the forest’s locksmith. Also gathered in front of the oak were the animals that had last seen Dorothy the day before. There was Timothy, a young rabbit, who visited Miss Snot’s house regularly, so as to study at her piano. At his place, with his eighteen little brothers and sisters, there was no room for a piano. And last but not least there was Daisy the

mouse, who was one of Dorothy's closest and dearest friends. The mole - doctor had come with her, to be on the safe side.

Cornelius stood at the front door, rang the bell a couple of times, and seeing that no one answered, he asked Jeffrey the colibri to unlock the door. Jeffrey did as he was told, and to their great surprise, the front door was locked, twice, from the inside.

"This means there was no breaking and entering," Cornelius said thoughtfully, "or else the door couldn't be locked from the inside."

Then he told Martha to light up, so that they could see, and he went inside the hallway of the oak tree. The rest of the animals followed him hesitatingly.

"Miss Snot! Miss Snot, are you there?" he shouted. His voice echoed on the tall walls of the tree, but no matter how many times he called for her, he got no answer.

Daisy the mouse, who was holding tight on the mole-doctor's arm, was whimpering all the time.

"What a terrible thing!" she said, "Oh, what a terrible thing!"

Suddenly, the door that led to the living room opened with a creak, and their shadows appeared on the wall, dancing like ghosts. Daisy screamed, and then she fainted, falling on top of the doctor. Cornelius rushed to her, and helped the doctor who was trying to bring her to.

"Dear Daisy," he told her, once she opened her eyes, "you really must try to stay calm, if you are to help us find out what happened to your poor friend. Okay?"

She agreed, nodding her head. She seemed to be on the verge of tears, but she promised that she would not shriek again, unless of course if something awfully terrible happened. And the animals started climbing the stairs.

The oak tree was so big, that it took more than an hour to search every single room. Cornelius insisted that they first made sure Dorothy was not hiding in one of the sixty-three rooms, or that she hadn't locked herself by accident in some closet. What was more, he had to be on the lookout for Martha who, whenever he wasn't looking, fled out of her lantern and into any closet or cupboard, to check on Dorothy's linen and chinaware.

"Dearest Martha," he told her, putting her back in the lantern, "it's not proper to go through other people's stuff."

"But of course it is!" she replied, "what if I bump into a trace?"

With this sort of thing happening all the time, the investigation was going rather slowly, besides they had to take turns carrying Daisy, who was fainting every other minute. For the final part of this morning's search Cornelius had left the bedroom, where he hoped that he would find the most important pieces of evidence.

Indeed, as soon as they reached the top floor of the tree, where the bedroom was, Martha noticed some footsteps on the stairs.

"There-take a look!" she shouted, her tail beaming like a flashlight, "it's like if someone just went up to the attic!"

"You're right, my dear," Cornelius said, bending with his magnifying glass over the footsteps. "We must find out who it was." And he told Olivia the viper to crawl on the traces. The rest of them would pay a visit at Dorothy's bedroom.

"D-do..do I have to come with you?" Daisy stuttered, however Cornelius was already inside.

It was very dark in there, so the first thing he did was open the windows and turn on the bedside lamps. The bed was unmade, and in the midst of the blankets, just as the sparrow had told them, there lay a nightgown. But it was a very strange one. Cornelius went over to the bed and started examining the nightgown.

“What a strange fabric. And how soft!” he said, running his fingers through the gown. When he looked at it against the light, it became almost transparent.

“It’s silk, I’m positive it’s silk!” Martha shouted, flying around his head. “I’ve seen silk lots of times, it’s expensive, but it’s very warm, although it’s so thin! I know because a cousin of mine, she had gone to China, and when she came back, she brought with her the most incredible...”

“Shht! Be quiet, my dear,” Cornelius said, and asked Daisy to come close. Martha was angry, she flew back in her lantern saying: “No one pays attention to me.” whilst Daisy the Mouse came over, trembling and sniffing.

“Yes...? What is it?” she asked, on the verge of new tears.

“Do you remember having seen this nightgown before?” Cornelius asked her. “You’ve been friends with Dorothy for many years—surely you must have seen it before, isn’t it so?”

Daisy touched the nightgown, trembling all over, and then said that no, it was the first time she saw this particular nightgown, and that Dorothy ought to have bought it recently.

“Hmm, that’s a strange thing to say,” Cornelius said, “Because, if this was indeed one of her newest nightgowns, as you say, wouldn’t she have taken it with her, instead of leaving it behind?”

“Maybe she didn’t take any clothes with her at all!” shouted Martha, who was still a little mad. But then Cornelius gave her a stern look, and she apologised. After all, everyone knew that Dorothy was a respectable caterpillar, and respectable caterpillars never leave home in the buff.

Then they looked in the closet, and this time they were lucky. Among the clothes there were a few empty hangers, and, according to Daisy, Dorothy’s red suitcase was missing.

“So,” Cornelius said, “even if Miss Snot did leave in a hurry, even if someone forced her to come with him, at least she had the time to pack a few things.”

Daisy was crying and asking who could have done such a terrible thing.

“You must be strong, my dear,” Cornelius told her, “that’s what I’m trying to find out.” At that very moment Olivia came in the bedroom. She was exhausted, since she had slithered all over the house.

“The footprints we saw on the staircase...” she said “...they go all the way up to the attic. And you know where they stop? Right in front of the window, which was wide open!”

“Good God! What is that supposed to mean?” Daisy shouted.

“That the kidnapper got away *flying!*” Martha said with a smile.

“I’m not so sure about that, my dear, not quite so sure,” Cornelius said, scratching his goatee beard. “For all we know, he could have slimy feet, and crawl his way down, jumping from branch to branch.”

“A frog! That’s it! The kidnapper’s a frog!” the doctor said.

“Doctor Weiss, let’s not be rash,” Cornelius told him kindly. “Frogs aren’t the only animals with slime on their feet. And besides, I’m not so sure it’s a kidnapping in the first place.”

“What?” everyone asked. “What else can it be?”

“Listen to me,” he insisted. “First of all, the house was locked from the inside, and then we didn’t find any ransom note. Last but not least...”

“What-?” Daisy asked, trembling.

“Why don’t you tell us, dear?” Cornelius said, turning to Olivia, with a cunning look in his eyes. “Have you found even *one* strange fingerprint all over the oak tree?”

The viper shook her head.

“No,I didn’t.And that’s what I was going to say-ain’t it weird?I mean, except for the footsteps in the attic,the only fingerprints I found were on the piano,and they matvh the paws of a young rabbit.”

“That was me!” Timothy the bunny shouted. “But I didn’t do it,I swear,I was only practicing on my piano exercises,and Miss Snot,I didn’t even see her last night!You’ve got to believe me!”

“Of course we believe you,dear child,calm down,” Cornelius told him,caressing his trembling ears. “It’s just that I was sure we wouldn’t find anyprints.And now,could you excuse me for a minute?”

The animals quietly obeyed,promising as they went to do their best to help him.As soon as he was left alone inside the bedroom,Cornelius took a step towards the nightstand,opened the drawer,and from within it he picked up a book. “Hmm,interesting” he mumbled,and began to leaf through it.

“So,when Mister Nealy rummages through other people’s stuff it’s perfectly okay!*I’m* the curious one,*I’m* the indiscreet one!”

However Cornelius payed little attention to her.He was engrossed in the book he had found.Marthe flew behind him,dead curious.

“Do you think this is the time to read a book?” she said,as she was coming close to him. “And besides,what book is this?Let me see!Let me see!”

But before she had time to take a glimpse at the pages,Cornelius shut the book and put it in his pocket.And then he did the same with a photo he had also found at the bottom of the nightstand drawer; it had a gilded frame.

“What’s in that book?What photo is that?” Martha shouted at the top of her voice. “I demand to know at once!I’m warning you!I’m gonna scream if you don’t tell!It’s not fair to do an investigation and then hide the clues from me!It’s not fair!Not fair at all!”

However Cornelius liked to keep his dear friend a bit wound up in such cases.So,with a broad smile on his face,he closed the drawer and said:

“You’ll find out as soon as we’re home again.At any rate,there’s one thing you can bet on: In this book and photo may lie the key to the whole mystery!”

4

Dorothy Snot’s diary

When they got back at their old linden,Cornelius rushed head on into his office.Martha was flying around him impatiently,all the while asking que-stions about the book and the photo he had found inside Dorothy Snot’s drawer,however Cornelius was far too busy.

“First I have to do this little thingie to get out of the way,darling,” he told her.

At that point Martha got extremely angry,told him that he didn’t de-serve such a fine firefly as herself as an assistant,and flew inside an empty jar of marmelade,vowing never to speak to him again.Cornelius was smiling underneath his great big moustache.Deep down he knew that his devoted friend never meant what she said when she was mad.And it was a fact that he had a very important thing to get out of the way.

He had to know if Dorothy Snot had left the oak tree on her own, before he blamed anyone for kidnapping her.