

Mr.Cornnook sighed. He'd been waiting outside Mr.Oinkoink's door for ten minutes in the freezing January cold. Winters in Maple Forest were not welcoming. Mr.Cornnook took a deep breath, then... "OINKOINK! GET UP! OINKOINK! PIGGY!" Mr. Oinkoink sat up straight and immediately began his unnecessary worrying. Who would not knock before screaming PIGGY? At him? He cautiously got up, and hugging his beloved book to his heart, opened the door a slight inch. Then Mr. Cornnook bounded in, speaking in his usual excited, extremely fast squeaky, weird voice. Today, however, there was a hint of worry in his voice, and his face was tense. "Oh, Mr.Oinkoink, I have important news! Do you know Miss. Heggy?" "What? Huh? Oh, the baker? Yes. She promised me a cherry pie delivered to the doorstep this afternoon." "Oh, all the neighbors are making a riot. She's gone missing!" Mr. Oinkoink finally looked up from his book. "So she's gone missing, you say? And what are we to do?" Mr. Cornnook was jumping up and down with impatience. "So we call a town meeting! Hurry hurry! Let's go!" Mr. Oinkoink was dragged out the door by Mr.Cornnook, hopping at full speed toward the town center. They rang the bell on top of the city tree, and the animals hurried to get into their seats in the conference room. Mr. Cornnook addressed the animals. "Animals, we have gathered today to discuss the case of missing Miss Heggy. First of all, we must assign jobs. Who will be willing to go and search for Miss Peggy?" Most animals raised their hands. Mr.Oinkoink did not. Why would he when he could be reading by the fire? Mr.Cornnook's lecture went on and on, and Mr. Oinkoink was wishing for his book more than ever. He did not pay attention until the question "Who will be the detective?" came up. All eyes turned to him. "M-me?" He stuttered. "Well, we all have decided who our detective will be. Oinkoink, you are going to be our detective. Like Sherlock Hares!" Oinkoink turned bright pink and began touching his bright pink fur coat for

comfort. He could tell there was no getting out of this, so he did not complain. He went home and tossed and turned all night. He worried. What if... What if...

A few days later, the search officially began. As a detective, Oinkoink would be informed immediately of any clues. He and Cornnook started with the bakery, the most likely place where any clues could be found. They opened the door. Oinkoink cautiously stepped inside.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” Oinkoink screamed. “Oh, dear, do we need to turn the lights on? It’s just some sacks of flour.” They flicked on the light and began their search. “Oh! It’s gone!” Mr. Cornnook exclaimed. Oinkoink immediately knew what he was talking about. Miss Heggy’s top secret recipe book was gone. She had shown it to Oinkoink, a trusted friend. To steal it was almost impossible, as it was one of Miss Heggy’s most prized possessions. What had happened? There were pastries, bowls, plates, spatulas, measuring spoons, and many other things overturned and scattered in the bakery. It looked like a murder scene from a movie. “Cornnook.” Oinkoink said, suddenly stopping. Cornnook crouched beside him. They examined Oinkoink’s findings. There were star-like footprints, made in flour, from a ripped sack of flour. The trail of footprints led outside and among trees. After a while, Oinkoink saw a bright pink and purple something on the ground. “Heggy’s favorite spatula!” Mr. Cornnook exclaimed with delight. Moving on, there was a scrap of an apron. Miss Heggy’s apron. They gasped. Oinkoink whipped out a magnifying glass and peered at the bit of fabric. “No blood.” he confirmed. That did not help the situation, for they were sure of one thing; Miss Heggy was in danger. They continued following the dusty white footprints, only staring at the muddy ground, and they did not notice when the trees got fewer and it got darker. “Blood!” Cornnook exclaimed. Sure enough, there was a red mark on the ground. It could have been icing, but who would think so? Everyone was so concerned about

Miss Heggy. They continued on. As they were only staring at the footprints, they did not notice as the ground beneath their feet began to turn barren.

“AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!” They screamed with all their might, but it was no use. As their last cries for help died down, the world became black.

Oinkoink and Cornnook found themselves being nursed in the hospital. Oinkoink immediately knew what had happened. It was something that happened in his sleep, he decided. He knew exactly what to do, and what had happened. “It was Mist.” Mr. Cornnook sat up straight. “Mist?” “Yes. It made us faint. It’s what protects The Tree and The Place.” Oinkoink continued. “Miss Heggy is in The Tree. She is in danger. She is being kept prisoner.” Mr. Cornnook shivered with fright and worry. “But, Oinkoink, I think maybe she isn’t in enough danger to continue searching? Maybe we could call the search off for a little while.” Oinkoink did not argue. Just the thought of The Tree made him want to scream for his mother.

Every day, Oinkoink thought of Miss Heggy, and how they had left her to fend for herself in this situation of danger just because they were scared. Every night, visions of what might be happening to Miss Heggy haunted his dreams. Finally, Oinkoink could not stand it anymore. He marched over to Cornnook’s house, in the freezing cold. He didn’t even have to knock on the door before the door swung open, with an excited looking Cornnook poking his little furry head out the door. “You were thinking the same thing weren’t you? Weren’t you! Great minds think alike!” He flung the door open even wider and ushered Oinkoink in.

At the town meeting, nobody wanted to search for Miss Heggy. They all cared and were worried, but fear overcame their concern. Except for Cornnook and Oinkoink. Well, thought Oinkoink, while touching his pink fluffy scarf, they weren't much help last time anyway. Nobody except Cornnook and Oinkoink had found much more than a few leaves. At least they all helped prepare the pig and rabbit for their search. They prepared gas masks, a knife each, helmets, strong leather jackets, scarves, hats, earmuffs (all pink and fluffy, to Oinkoink's request), and a walkie talkie, so they could call for help. They set off at dawn, with a crowd of animals to see them off. When they left, the animals all dispersed and went back into their huts, shutting the doors behind them tight. They set off with their flashlights to guide them, taking each step with caution. They made their way slowly to the area of The Tree and fastened their gas masks. Oinkoink checked once, twice, three times to make sure his mask was secure. He did not want another bad encounter with Mist. "Here I come, Miss Heggy " he whispered under his breath as he entered The Place.

Entering The Place, Oinkoink trembled with fear. He wanted to scream for his mom again. They heard howls and deep rumbles coming from within The Tree. Oinkoink trembled. However, Cornnook was beside himself with excitement. "We made it! Can you believe it Oinkoink? WE MADE IT! We're going to save Miss Heggy!" He was jumping around like crazy. Oinkoink could not understand. What was wrong with him? Well, he was always like that anyway. They made their way, not unlike sloths, and after what felt like a blink of an eye, they were there. Well, to anyone watching, it would have felt like two years, but not to Oinkoink or

Cornnook. Cornnook reached the door first and swung it open. Oinkoink could not believe his eyes.

“HAPPY BIRTHDAY!” Miss Heggy squealed, running toward Oinkoink, two balloons, one popped, in her clutch. “I even baked you a cake! I know, I’ve been partying with these wonderful animals. They call themselves dust bunnies, you know! Then, I remembered your birthday!” Oinkoink did not have words. What? Miss Heggy had been partying? To ditch the animals of Maple Forest? She did not seem harmed at all, except for a few rips in her apron. She started babbling, how happy she was to see them, oh how great it was here, the dust bunnies were nice, but Oinkoink did not listen. He was so confused.

Miss Heggy was interrupted when the dust bunnies decided to charge at what they thought were intruders. It was true, Oinkoink and Cornnook had not been invited. It was only when the dust bunnies had released so much dust that the whole room was covered in a gray-white cloud that Miss Heggy was able to ease the tension that had mounted. She took a big fan (“This comes in handy!”) and started blowing the dust out the door, all the while explaining that the party was actually for Oinkoink and that they were her friends and completely harmless little creatures that were scared of everything (at this moment, Cornnook tried to protest, but Oinkoink held him back) and that the dust bunnies should treat them better than throwing off their dust. Eventually, the dust bunnies invited Cornnook and Oinkoink to their party. It was probably the best birthday Oinkoink had.

Miss Heggy revealed that she had actually gone because the dust bunnies had stolen her top-secret recipe book. She had not returned because she did not think anybody would miss her. Nobody paid any attention to her in her bakery. They probably only missed her pastries, not her. Besides, nobody wanted to go near her because of her spikes. All hedgehogs have that problem. She was very stressed about her work hours and was lonely. But here, with the dust bunnies, they cared about her and partied with her. What could be better than that? True, she had had to teach them how to sing and dance first, but now they were experts. The animals had the best time together until one by one, they fell asleep, right there on the floor.

In the morning, Miss Heggy made special pancakes, which were taro and very fluffy. All the animals devoured them and even got seconds. Then, the dust bunnies decided to put on a concert with Miss Heggy. Surprisingly, they were good! Oinkoink and Cornnook found themselves crying to the song.

After a year of going back and forth to the tree and Maple Forest, Oinkoink finally convinced the dust bunnies to come out and have a concert. Miss Heggy was skeptical, and the dust bunnies were not so sure, but Oinkoink and Cornnook were very convincing. They all headed out together, loading baskets of baked treats and refreshments for the concert. Soon, the song began, and the crowd of animals became larger and larger, weeping animals among smiling and cheering fans, big next to small, and next thing they knew, they were all singing together as one whole voice. The voice of Maple Forest.

