

New in the Neighborhood

*In which we meet Manford
and Manford meets new friends*

THE SUN STRUCK THE TOP of MorningGlory Mountain first at The Place With No Trees. Light moved slowly down the mountain then, down rocky cliffs to where only short trees grew, down to spruce groves wet with morning dew, then to the forest of beech and noble fir at the base of the mountain itself. A gentle wind blew, rustling leaves and breaking the early stillness. It was morning. It was spring. It was time to go exploring.

Manford had been awake for hours. He'd watched the sky grow brighter out his bedroom window as dawn slowly came, until now the sun shone in to warm his soft, fuzzy nose.

"Time for breakfast, Manford."

That was his mother calling. They had moved to MorningGlory Forest just the week before and had already settled in to their familiar routine. "Time for breakfast, Manford," his mother would always say. It sounded so comforting first thing in the morning.

They'd finished unpacking and putting things away, filling shelves of new cupboards and closets with tidy stacks and rows of belongings. Today he could explore. He could look around his new neighborhood to see what he could see.

"What are you going to do today?" Manford's mother asked.

"Explore the woods," he replied. "I want to see what's around us."

"Maybe you'll find some new friends."

"I hope so."

"You're having a birthday in a couple of days," his mother went on. "If you meet someone nice, invite him or her to your party."

"Oh, I will. Should I tell them to bring presents?"

"That wouldn't be polite, dear. Just let them think of it on their own."

"But what if they don't think of it?"

"Having new friends is present enough."

"I suppose," Manford said. His mother was always so logical.

"Now remember to be home early," she said. "Your father will be on TV tonight and you won't want to miss that."

“Okay,” Manford said, and he skipped out the front door and into the woods.

Now there’s something you should know about Manford before we go much further. Skipping out the front door may be easy for you, but for Manford, it’s not so simple. Manford is a moose, you see, and he has four feet.

Manford walked north along a worn path through the woods, looking up and down and around at everything. He saw huge trees with great, overhanging branches. Sunlight streamed through them – soft, yellow-green light that made bright patches on the forest floor. Flowers of red, yellow, white, pink, and purple offered frequent spots of color. Fresh grasses, spiky horsetails, and new green ferns waved gently in the slight breeze. He nibbled at leaves and blossoms as he went. Some tasted good. Others – pooeey! – didn’t.

He stopped to listen. A bird chirped to his left. Soon another answered in the distance to his right. A woodpecker drilled a tree trunk behind him.

“Hello,” Manford said. Those that saw him only looked at him and flew off.

He came to a creek and turned to follow it upstream. The bottom was rocky and slippery but Manford waded along sure-footed, stopping at times for a drink. The water made soft sounds as it splashed over rocks and washed against the mossy bank.

The land rose up beside the creek as he walked along. He was led into a canyon. The sounds of the water grew louder until a rainy, splashing sound came from where the creek led around a bend. Manford grew more and more curious and followed the creek still farther. Around the bend, he saw where the canyon ended just ahead at a tall cliff. A lovely waterfall spilled lightly from it.

He walked closer, looking up at the misty stream of water rushing over a ledge far above and falling down, down, down, into a large pool at the base of the cliff. He waded around the edge and under the falls, letting the water splash over his head and back and down his long, skinny legs, and thinking how cool and good it felt.

Then he noticed the cave behind the waterfall. It had a large, arched door, a mailbox fastened to the rock wall next to it, and a fuzzy mat on the step for wiping feet. Ivy grew around and over the doorway, framing it in a pleasant leafy green. There was a sign on the door:

Misty Falls
Millie & Veronica
Welcome

Manford saw a large brass knocker below the sign and banged it three times. No one came. He banged it again, harder. The door drifted slightly open.

“Hello, anybody home?” he said, pulling the door open farther. No answer. He looked inside, saw or heard no one, so pushed the door shut.

I wonder who they are, he thought as he walked through the falls and pool and back the way he’d come.

He backtracked to where he’d first entered the creek. He left the water there and headed northeast along the forest path. Trees surrounded him. They looked like they went on and on in all directions. *So much to explore,* Manford thought. *It’ll take all summer.*

He came upon a large meadow about mid-morning. Soft grass grew over most of the thirty-acre clearing, along with white, many-petaled flowers he knew to be daisies. He saw a broad-branching tree across the meadow that made a round spot of shade on the ground.

Sounds came from the direction of the tree. They weren't water splashing or gurgling sounds. Not wind-blowing or leaf-fluttering sounds, either. Not even bird-chirping or insect-buzzing sounds — not woody sounds at all. This was different. This sounded like music, rock and roll music, playing very loud.

There was something moving in the shade of the tree. Manford walked closer, the music got louder, and the moving form took on a shape. Moose are near-sighted, you see, and have to get up close.

It's a bear, he decided, when he was near enough to figure it out. *Yes, a bear. It's listening to that music and ... dancing.*

"Hello," Manford said. The bear danced on, not hearing him above the loud music. Manford walked closer and said "Hello" again. The bear kept dancing and didn't even look his way.

He walked closer, till it seemed the bear might reel right into him, and shouted "Hello!" one more time. The bear looked up, startled, and paused for a moment.

"What did you say?" it asked in a loud voice.

"I said: HELLO," shouted Manford.

"Oh, hello." It started dancing again.

"What's your name?" yelled Manford.

"What?" said the bear, pausing again.

"I asked your name," said Manford. "You don't suppose you could turn that music down, do you?"

"Name?" asked the bear. "I'm Veronica. Who are you?"

"I'm Manford. Really, could you turn that music down?"

"What?" said Veronica. "Just a minute, I can't hear you. I'll turn the music down." She did so and the music faded away.

"You said your name was Shortbread?" asked the bear.

"No, it's Manford.

"Man-ford ... hmmm, I haven't heard of you. You must be new to MorningGlory Forest."

"I moved here last week with my mom," said Manford. "She thought it was a nice neighborhood."

"It is. There's lots of space."

"Is that your home at Misty Falls where the sign says *Millie & Veronica*?"

"Uh-huh, how did you know that?"

"I followed the creek there. Who's Millie?"

"That's my mom."

"She wasn't home," Manford said. "I knocked but nobody answered."

"No," said Veronica, "she's traveling with the circus again."

"Circus?"

"Sure, haven't you heard of Millie, the Dancing Bear? I thought everyone knew about her."

"I'm only one year old," said Manford, "or at least I will be in a few days. There are lots of things I haven't heard of, I suppose."

“Probably,” said Veronica, “but don’t feel bad. I just turned two.”

They sat down in the shade of the tree. Veronica plucked a white daisy and placed it behind her ear. Manford nibbled the grass.

“Does this place have a name?” he asked.

“Which place?”

“Where we’re sitting.”

“This is White-Flower Meadow,” Veronica said.

“It’s named after the daisies, I’ll bet,” said Manford.

“Is that what these flowers are?”

“Yes.”

“Well, the one who named it didn’t know that. They were just white flowers growing in a meadow.”

“Who named it?”

“I did,” said Veronica.

“Did you name MorningGlory Mountain, too?”

“No, that was already named. The forest around us is MorningGlory Forest and the creek you followed to my place is MorningGlory Creek.”

“Why didn’t you call this MorningGlory Meadow?”

“We had enough MorningGlorys as it was,” said Veronica. “Besides, there aren’t any morning glories here, just ... what did you say these were?”

“Daisies.”

“Daisies ... Daisy Meadow ... hmmm.”

“You were dancing to music when I got here,” Manford said. “Did you learn that from your mom?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Are you going to join the circus, too?”

“Someday, maybe. My mom learned from her mother, who learned from her mother, and so on. I come from a long line of circus bears.”

“Why do you keep her name on the door if she’s gone?”

“Because she’s famous,” Veronica said. “She has her posters hung all over inside. She also still lives there. She’ll be home at the end of summer.”

Veronica offered to show Manford around. The two new friends left the shade of the tree to follow a trail leading north from the meadow.

“I’d like to see her dance sometime,” said Manford. “Is she ever on TV?”

“She has been.”

“My dad’s going to be on TV tonight.”

“He is?” Veronica asked. “Why is that?”

“My dad’s in show business, too,” Manford said. “He dances with the ballet in New York.”

“You mean The Great Bucknikov, the world’s only ballet-dancing moose? He’s your *dad*?”

“Sure is,” said Manford proudly. “Have you seen him?”

“Yes, I have,” said Veronica. “He’s spectacular! I’ll be sure to watch tonight, too. How did he ever get into ballet in New York?”

“It’s a strange story and I don’t understand it all. Maybe my mom will tell you sometime.”

"I want to hear that."

"Oh," Manford said, suddenly remembering, "I'm having a birthday party the day after tomorrow. Want to come?"

"Sure," said Veronica, and the two continued their walk through the forest, Manford giving directions about what time to come and how to find his house and trying very hard not to say anything about presents.

They followed along the trail, stopping to look at things around them and to sample the foliage as they went. They climbed steadily uphill, but in a short while the path flattened out in an open, grassy area. Manford stopped.

"Is this the top?" he asked.

"It's the top of Lookout Hill," said Veronica, "but the real mountains are over there. Look."

Manford looked to the east and saw three mountains much larger than the small hill they'd climbed. The farthest one was huge, far taller than the others. It rose to meet the clouds, then passed on through them. It was the biggest thing Manford had ever seen.

"That's MorningGlory Mountain," Veronica said.

Manford stared. The mountain seemed to get bigger and bigger the more he looked at it.

"Have you ever been to the top?" he asked.

"No, I haven't," Veronica replied. "But there's a special place up there called The Place With No Trees. I've always wondered what it was."

"Oh, let's climb it sometime," Manford said enthusiastically. "We could take a picnic and climb up through the clouds and see everything around here. Want to?"

"Um, sure," said Veronica, but she sounded like she *wasn't* sure, like she wondered if it was really a good idea. "We'd need more than a picnic if we did," she said. "Climbing MorningGlory would take several days. You have to climb the two mountains in front of it first."

"Oh, fun," Manford bubbled on. "Maybe after my birthday."

"Maybe," Veronica said. "We'll see."

"There's a pond," Manford said, pointing below them. "Does *it* have a name?"

"I don't know if it does or not."

The trail led them downhill through a series of twists and turns. Near the pond they crossed a bridge over another creek. Manford's hooves made clippy-clop noises on the wooden planks. Going for a swim seemed like a good idea. They ran and galloped down the last stretch of trail and plunged into the pond with a tremendous splash.

"*Run for your lives! Run for your lives!*" said a voice. There was a great squawking and flapping of wings.

"What was that?" Manford asked, poking up his head and blowing water from his nose.

"What was what?" Veronica said as she came sputtering to the surface.

"*Bogies at ten o'clock! Bogies at ten o'clock! Run for your lives!*" the voice screeched again.

"That," said Manford.

"I don't know," Veronica replied. They looked around them.

"*Red alert, red alert! To your battle stations!*"

"Noisy thing, whatever it is," said Veronica.

"*Out of the pool, you two,*" the noise said again. "*Run along, run along.*"

"There's something pink in the top of that tree," Manford said, pointing toward the edge of the pond, "but I can't tell what it is."

"Can't see a thing," said Veronica. Bears are even more near-sighted than moose.

"Hello," Manford yelled, "come down so we can see who you are."

"Nothing doing," said the pink thing. "I'm staying right here until you two are gone. So, on your way, goodbye, leave me and my pond alone."

"Your pond?" said Veronica. "Since when?"

"Since yesterday, that's when."

"What happened then?"

"That's when I got here. I was the only one here so I declared it my pond."

"I just got here, too," Manford said.

"What *are* you, by the way?" the noise wanted to know.

"A moose," said Manford.

"That's what I thought. Your friend must be a bear."

"Right," said Veronica.

"I didn't know there were moose and bear in Florida."

"The noise is talking about Florida," Manford said to Veronica. "Is MorningGlory Mountain in Florida?"

"No," said Veronica, "Florida is three thousand miles from here."

"This isn't Florida," Manford said to the noise. "That's a long way from here."

"Oh, dear," said the noise, "not again."

"Please come down," Manford said. "We won't have to shout if you come closer. And if you tell us who you are, we won't have to call you The Noise."

"You promise to be nice?"

"We promise," Manford and Veronica said at once.

The pink thing flapped its wings then and glided down to the edge of the water. It walked slowly toward them, stopped a safe distance away, then stood on one long, skinny leg and tucked the other leg under its body.

"I'm Manford," said Manford.

"I'm Veronica," said Veronica.

"How do you do," said the pink thing. "I'm Flossie."

"I'm a bear, as you observed," said Veronica. "What are you?"

"A bird," replied Flossie, holding her head high on her long neck. "A flamingo, to be exact; a pink flamingo."

"I've never seen anything like you before," Manford said.

"Really? There were thousands of others when I left. I wonder what happened to them. You're sure this isn't Florida?"

"Oh, I'm sure of that," said Veronica.

"Well, I *was* starting to wonder," Flossie said. "I haven't seen a palm tree anywhere around here. And I don't remember any mountains like this in Florida."

"I'm confused," said Manford.

"Me, too, kiddo," said Flossie. "A week ago I was in Florida on a beach with so many other flamingos that all you could see was pink for half a mile. One night I couldn't sleep, so I de-

cided to fly around for a while. Nothing looked familiar in the morning so I just kept going for days and days, looking and looking. I've been resting here since yesterday, wondering what to do next, hoping this was really Florida."

"It isn't," said Veronica.

"Just my luck," Flossie said. "I wonder why this keeps happening to me?"

"Keeps happening?" Manford said.

"I did the same thing last year. I was flying along and lost my way then, too. I kept going until I eventually found palm trees and open water. I thought sure I was home. Trouble was, there was all this cactus and desert. Turns out I was in Arizona."

"How did you get back?" Manford asked.

"I followed jet trails of airliners going to Miami."

"You must fly pretty fast," said Veronica.

"No, I could only follow one for a little while," Flossie said. "But there was always another one along soon. Maybe I can do the same thing this time."

"Why do you stand on one leg?" Manford asked. He'd been wondering about this ever since Flossie flew down from the tree.

"It's what flamingos do," Flossie answered. "We rest one leg while we stand on the other."

"I wonder if I can do that," said Veronica. She stood up on her hind legs, then leaned to one side and lifted one leg cautiously into the air.

"How's this?"

"Not bad," said Flossie. "Now tuck it under your arm."

Veronica brought the back leg slowly forward, lifted it, then lost balance, tipped over, and hit the water with a great splash.

"Wow, you could surf on that wave," said Flossie, running toward shore. "Now you try, Manford."

Manford carefully lifted one front leg, then one back leg, and teetered unsteadily.

"Now what?" he said.

"That's not going to work," Flossie said. "Try standing up like Veronica did."

Manford heaved his front quarters into the air and balanced unsteadily on his back legs. He looked around, unsure about what to do next. His puzzlement lasted about six seconds, whereupon he keeled over backwards into the water with Veronica.

"*Man the lifeboats,*" Flossie shouted above the noise; "*moose overboard.*"

Veronica and Manford were now splashing water on each other and at Flossie. The water just rolled off her delicate pink feathers.

"Drop by and see me again," Flossie said, unfolding her wings and getting ready to fly across the pond.

"Aren't you going back to Florida?" asked Veronica.

"I'm not in any hurry."

"I'm having a birthday party the day after tomorrow," said Manford. "Would you like to come?"

"Who's going to be there?" Flossie asked.

"Veronica and you, if you like."

"Doesn't sound like much of a party with only two. Are we the only friends you have?"

“So far,” Manford said, “but my mom will be there.”

“Well, that’s something,” Flossie said. She paused, thinking a moment. “I have an idea. If I bring a friend and Veronica brings a friend, then you’ll have four at your party, or six counting you and your mom.”

“Sounds okay to me,” Manford said.

“You’ll get more presents that way,” Flossie said.

“Mom said I wasn’t supposed to talk about presents.”

“Oh, yes, aren’t mothers always that way. Don’t worry, we won’t say anything.”

“Oh, no, not a thing,” said Veronica. “What kind of presents would you like?”

“Gosh, I don’t know.”

“Give us a clue,” said Flossie; “what kinds of things do you like to do?”

“I like to go exploring and adventuring,” said Manford. “I want to climb mountains and see what there is to see.”

“Edmund Hillary Lewis-and-Clark Moose: that’s you?”

“Who are those people?”

“Explorers and adventurers,” said Flossie. “You should read about them sometime. Do you have a friend to bring to the party, Veronica?”

“Uh-huh, do you?”

“No, but I’ll look for one. Well, it’s been nice meeting you two,” Flossie said. “See you later.” And off she flew.

Manford and Veronica walked back along the trail. They stopped on the hilltop to look at MorningGlory Mountain once again, then returned to White-Flower Meadow.

“Veronica ...” Manford said.

“What?”

“What would it be like to see ten thousand flamingos standing on one leg?”

“I think it would look pretty strange,” said Veronica. “Hmmm, if you gave one a push, do you think they’d all fall over?” They both laughed and sat down in the shade of the big tree.

Flossie, meanwhile, flew across the pond and into the woods. She was thinking. I’m not in Florida, that much is becoming fairly clear. But where am I? I forgot to ask. I only found out where I’m not. And what’s more, thanks to my own bright idea, now I have to take a friend I don’t have to a birthday party for a moose. Where will I find a friend on short notice? And what kind of present should I give to a moose? Flossie, she thought, you sure lead an interesting life.

She sat in a tree and looked around. It’s quiet here, she thought. I’m not used to that. It was never quiet with those other flamingos around. And the air smells good: fresh and clean instead of like salt and fish. That’s a pleasant change. The forest is different, not at all like the shore, but it has its charm. The neighbors are a little strange — moose, bears, who knows what all — but they seem friendly enough. Maybe I’ll stay for the summer. Other birds fly north, if this is north. Why not me?

Below her, Flossie saw a trail leading through the trees. It was headed east, but Flossie didn’t know that. She wouldn’t know east from her great aunt Sally. But she was curious, so she dropped to the ground and followed it, stopping and looking and wondering as she went. She met no new friends. In fact, she met no one at all. *Plenty of privacy here, she observed.*

She saw a large mound off the path to her left after she'd gone about a quarter-mile. It was at the edge of a grassy clearing and was connected to the side of a hill. The mound was taller than she and maybe twenty feet around the outside. A path led to it. Out of curiosity, she followed.

The mound looked to be a dwelling. She walked around it and found an opening at ground level. A small amount of light came from within.

"Hello," she said loudly several times. There was no answer. She crouched low to the ground and poked her head into the entrance. A passage led inside. Occasional candles in holders on the wall lit the way. There was room for her to crawl inside. She did so, thinking she'd only look around.

The way led down to a large room with a fireplace, several chairs, and a couch. The furniture looked comfortable and recently used. There were pictures on the wall — small paintings of woodland scenes. Soft moss covered the floor.

I should leave, she thought. I should wait outside till someone returns. But she had to look around just a little.

Passageways led from the mound back into the hill to other rooms: a kitchen with a huge pantry, and a bedroom. She opened the pantry doors. Inside were bags and bags of potato chips — half a lifetime's supply, it appeared. She was puzzled.

Stairs led her to an upper level deep in the hill where she found three more rooms. Two were bedrooms. The third, also with its supply of potato chips, looked to be a hobby room. It had a work table with paints and brushes and small jars of colored beads. Each room was neat and tidy. Each was lit with candles.

Who lives here? Flossie wondered. *Perhaps the friend I'm seeking? I'd better go outside and wait.*

She went into the main upstairs bedroom. The bed looked soft and inviting; she had to test it, just for a minute. Flossie lay down, sank into the covers and rested her head on the pillow.

Florida can wait, she thought; this is nice. And she fell asleep in moments, in the upstairs room, in the quiet house, with candles burning faintly in the hall.