

## Nora and Nana and the Case of the Missing Socks

By Monica Lucas, Meade County

It suddenly became cloudy when it was supposed to be a beautiful sunny day. Nora looked up and couldn't believe her eyes. There stood Mr. Twinkle - right behind them.

"Don't look back," Nora whispered to Nana and continued walking. Nora had plans to go to the pool with Nana today and nothing was stopping them. Not even Mr. Twinkle.

They continued walking until they reached the gated entrance to the pool. The shadow continued to follow them. They found empty chairs, placed their swim bag and towels on them, kicked off their shoes, and headed toward the pool. The sun was shining on everyone except for one big shadow over Nora and Nana, caused by Mr. Twinkle's shadow.

"Let's ignore him," Nora suggested to Nana. "I want to swim today."

"So do I." Replied Nana. "But you know he isn't going to let us."

"We can just pretend like he isn't here. What can he do?" Nora replied.

Nora jumped into the water as Nana climbed down the stairs. No one else at the pool could see Mr. Twinkle. How surprised they would be if they could see the thirty-foot penguin standing at the edge of the pool, eyes focused on Nora and Nana.

Nora and Nana had met Mr. Twinkle over a year ago when he suddenly appeared in their driveway and wouldn't leave until they climbed up his back and sat in the two red chairs attached to his feathers. They were astonished when he flew them toward the clouds and even more astonished to discover the cities in the clouds. They had become quite famous in the cloud world for their ability to solve mysteries. Mr. Twinkle never gave them the option to say no. Now, here he stood at the pool watching and waiting.

Suddenly, the shadow disappeared, and Nora felt the sun on her face. She smiled. She had ignored Mr. Twinkle and had won! However, her smile faded as she saw Mr. Twinkle standing on the diving board.

"How is he not breaking it?" She wondered. Nora looked around. Nana was also watching the diving board.

Without warning, he shot up in the air. Nora and Nana watched as he came down and hit the water like a giant cannonball. Every single drop of water flew out of the pool. People began to panic and yell. How strange it was standing on the pool floor with no water. Words like tornado and cyclone were being shouted.

Everyone was ushered out of the pool and out the gate. The pool was closed. Mr. Twinkle stood at the center of the empty pool. He seemed to have a slight smirk as he turned his back to them and bent for them to climb on.

They took their usual red seats, buckled in, and then Mr. Twinkle bent his knees and shot straight into the air. Higher, higher, higher, higher, until he was up in the clouds. They traveled through streaks of thin clouds, then they grew fluffier. They looked at the clouds as they traveled through them, recognizing some they had visited previously.

Mr. Twinkle landed on a bright, fluffy cloud, bent for Nora and Nana to slide off, then immediately disappeared. They looked around. Typically, someone greeted them, but they saw no one. To the left was a lane that led to a farmhouse. The road to the right seems to lead to the small town they could see in the distance. They began walking toward the farmhouse.

Suddenly, Nora stopped. "Look!" She said as she pointed to a large tree. There were two horses tied to a fence behind the tree. "I bet those are for us."

They mounted the horses that immediately began walking toward the farmhouse. They knew where they were going as they walked up the lane and into the big red barn. They walked to the house and were about to knock when they heard a lot of noise in the backyard. They walked around to the back of the house and found several people gathered there.

Nora and Nana immediately noticed something strange. They wore dresses, pants, jeans, and shorts, but every person was barefoot. One of the men looked and discovered them standing in there.

"There You are!" He exclaimed. "I am sorry I didn't come to greet you myself. I am glad you found the horses." He continued. "My name is Mr. Thomas. This is my farm. I am the one who sent for you."

Noticing the expression on their faces, he quickly explained that everyone was barefoot because someone had been stealing their socks. That was the reason he had summoned them.

A slight giggle escaped Nora's lips before she could stop it. Mr. Thomas frowned and motioned for them to follow him. He led them to a man sitting in a chair with a blanket over his lap and legs. He pointed to the man's feet. They were red, swollen, and covered with the worst blisters Nora and Nana had ever seen.

"How awful." Gasp'd Nana. "What happened?"

Mr. Thomas explained that without socks, shoes were impossible to wear for farm work. They needed their heavy shoes and boots for safety, but without socks, blisters and sores formed quickly. He also explained that the farm was suffering with the chores not being done.

"I don't mean to sound impertinent, but can't you buy more socks?" Nana asked. "Surely there are stores around here that sell socks."

"Between the three farms in our county, we have bought every pair in every store and by the next day, they're gone. We have even been crocheting and knitting more. They also disappear." Chimed in a woman standing next to Thomas.

Nora and Nana noticed that plants and trees were dying and weeds were growing everywhere. Many of the people were hobbling around, evidently with swollen feet.

"Why not work barefoot?" Nora asked.

"It's much too dangerous. Too many things you could step on and cut your feet." Thomas answered. "Also, Farm machinery is dangerous. We could lose the toes, even legs, without proper footwear."

"You mentioned all three farms in the area are buying socks. Are they disappearing from the other farms, too?" Asked Nana.

Thomas nodded. "All the farms have been targeted." He explained. "Someone is trying to put us out of business. Although, I can't imagine anyone in town wanting to harm the farms. That hurts all the people in the town. Almost everything is provided by our three farms."

"So, there are only three farms in town and they provide food for most of the community?" Asked Nana.

"Yes, There's Robinson Farm and the Jacobs farm. Together, we provide not only fruit and vegetables, we also provide chicken, beef, and pork." Mr. Thomas explained.

They mounted fresh horses provided by Mr. Thomas and rode to town. It looked like a typical small town. They saw churches, a library, a courthouse, two restaurants, an ice cream shop, and a few other buildings along the Main St. They chose a restaurant first. With only a few people inside, the waitress was friendly and chatty. They asked her if she knew anything about the missing socks.

"Oh, yeah!" She replied. "Everyone in town is talking about it. It's been going on for weeks now. It sounds like the farms are in trouble. It's gonna hurt all the businesses around here because we get a lot of goods from them. It doesn't make any sense."

They thanked her, then continued through town. They decided the only business that might compete with the farms was the grocery. They entered and approached the girl at the cash register.

"We were just wondering if you knew anything about the missing socks?" Nana asked after they had introduced themselves.

"Oh my, isn't that awful?" She retorted. "How are farmers supposed to work without socks? We ordered a bunch more socks recently and they bought them all."

"The grocery store sells socks?" Nora asked.

"We sell more than groceries. We have a clothing section in the back and also a hardware section." The girl said.

"That's interesting," said Nana. "Do you get any of your food from the local farms?"

"Most of it." The girl acknowledged. "We ship a few things in. But most of our fresh fruits, vegetables, and meat come from the local farmers."

Nora and Nana stood on the sidewalk outside the store and compared notes. "If the farmers went out of business, the grocery could ship food in from a different vendor, raise prices, and possibly make more money," Nana said. Nora agreed.

They continued following Mr. Thomas's directions until they came upon a farm, much bigger than Thomas's. It had five barns, tractors, other farm machinery, and large fields of trees and plants. They rode up to the door and knocked.

A barefoot woman answered the door and ushered them in. "Come in," she said. "We're having a meeting right now."

They followed the woman into the house and into the living room with seven men and six women. She introduced Nana and Nora to the group. They said Mr. Thomas had called and they were expecting them. Nora and Nana joined the group. Nora asked if they had any ideas or suspects. They all shook their heads. They explained they had the same problems as the Thomas's and how their farm suffered.

When asked if they had stayed up and watched to see who was stealing, they explained that they had taken turns staying up at night. The three farms had then agreed to hire a local delivery man, Mr. Davis to be their watchman. He rotated the three farms through the night and had never seen anyone. The socks were being stolen, even when locked away.

Next, they visited the Jacobs's farm, where they heard the same story. Their farm was further from town and much smaller than the other two. They noticed the women were wearing sandals and asked about that. Mrs. Jacobs explained that they wore sandals to go to town, but couldn't do farm work in them. The other difference they noticed the atmosphere wasn't as gloomy as those at the other two farms, children were playing and the adults were sitting outside, seeming to have normal conversations. However, their farm looked as neglected as the other two.

Nora and Nana stopped at a local park to discuss their notes. They were stumped as to who had a good reason to want the farms to fail. "This is what we know." Stated Nora as she looked at her notepad. "Socks are disappearing on three farms. No one sees the thief. No one would seem to benefit from the farms failing. Mr. Davis is the watchman for all three farms. All three farms look untended."

They decided to spend the night at the Thomas farm and watch to see what happened. They also wanted to meet Mr. Davis and question him. When they returned to the Thomas farm, they asked about Mr. Davis. "He's been making deliveries for the past two years. He was typically

here by 5 am but now comes around 3 or 4 to check on the socks. No matter what time he comes, the socks are missing, and he hasn't seen anything suspicious."

One thought kept nagging Nora and she said to Nana, "I just can't get the Jacob's family out of my mind. When we arrived, they were laughing and seemed in good spirits. There's just something fishy about them. I know they are a smaller farm and might not lose as much money as the others, but I can't shake the feeling something isn't right there." Nana nodded in agreement.

They borrowed the horses again and rode back to the Jacobs farm. The sun was fading, and all looked peaceful. They rode the horses quietly to the barn and looked in. At first, nothing seemed out of order. Then, they noticed a light coming from behind the back doors. Nora pushed the doors ajar, and they couldn't believe their eyes. In a field, completely hidden from sight, was another barn. In that field, men and women were working with floodlights. Healthy looking vegetables were growing. Everyone had work boots on.

Nora closed the door. They quietly departed. They could now prove that the Jacobs had a working farm and they had socks, but they had no evidence that they were taking socks from the other farms. They hurried back to the Thomas farm and slid into bed. They set their alarm for 3 AM. They would meet Mr. Davis and see if he had any similar suspicions.

When the alarm sounded, they quickly dressed and snuck downstairs and out the door. They hid behind a large tree. It wasn't long until a large blue van pulled into the driveway and parked close to the back door. A man emerged, looked around, then headed into the house carrying two large boxes. Nora crept to the window to watch. He placed one box on the kitchen table and looked around the house. He then took a key from his pocket, opened the locked box, and poured the socks into the second box. He then checked the cabinets and drawers for more socks, finding a bag of them in the microwave. He added those to his box and taped it closed.

Nora and Nana slipped into the back of the van before Mr. Davis returned. They hid behind several boxes as he traveled to the Robinson farm. They watched through the window as he also took their socks and taped them in a delivery box. Next, they were on their way to the Jacobs's farm.

When he pulled into the Jacobs' drive, they could see a big fire pit with the fire going. Mr. Davis exited the van, took the two boxes of socks, and threw both into the fire. They watched as Mrs. Jacobs came running from the house and gave him a big hug.

"Thank you so much." She said. "I don't know what we would do without you."

He smiled softly and said, "You're my sister. I love you. You know I'll do anything I can do to help you."

Nora had seen enough. She jumped from the van and confronted the couple. "Just what is going on here? Why are you trying to put the other two farms out of business?"

Mrs. Jacobs put her hand over her mouth. "What are you doing here?" She whispered.

"We decided to follow the socks and this is where we've solved the case," Nana said as she jumped out of the van. "We witnessed Mr. Davis stealing and burning the socks."

"What are you talking about?" Mr. Davis asked. "I would never do such a thing. I have been working for these families for two years. They trust me."

Mrs. Jacobs began crying. "I'm so, so sorry." She spoke. "We didn't want to put them out of business, I promise. We just wanted them to have fewer crops so we could sell all of ours."

Nora called the Thomas's and the Robinson's and both families came quickly to the Jacobs farm. Mr. Robinson suggested calling the police, but Mr. Thomas said he wanted to hear from the Jacobs why they had done such a thing. "We've always worked together in the past. Why did you think you had to hurt us to get ahead? It doesn't make any sense. You've always seemed happy with your portion of the profits and not the type of people to want it all." Mr. Thomas looked defeated as he finished. "I don't understand, but we must call the police."

Mr. Davis stepped forward. "I will take the blame for all of this." He shook his head at Mrs. Jacobs as she began to protest. "No, Kathy. It's alright." He began to explain. "Kathy is my sister. When we discovered that her granddaughter was ill and needed money for medical expenses, we tried to borrow. The bank wouldn't give us a loan. So, I hatched this silly plan to slow your farm operations and allow the Jacobs's farm to sell all their crops this year. I know it was a dreadful plan, but we desperately need the money, and I couldn't think of anything else. I hatched the plan alone. Kathy didn't know it was me until after I had begun taking the socks."

Mrs. Jacobs continued to cry softly. Mrs. Robinson and Mrs. Thomas tried to comfort her. She pulled away. "How can you stand to be around me?" Mrs. Jacobs sobbed. "I don't deserve your sympathy."

Mr. Thomas took out his phone and moved to the other room to make a call. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson joined him. Nora and Nana also joined them. They were expecting to hear him call the police. They were surprised. They knew the Jacobs would be as well.

They returned to the room full of people. Mr. Thomas spoke. "What you have done is a terrible thing. But we consider everyone in this town family, that includes you. We take care of each other. I have called the bank. They have agreed to the loan, as long as my family and the Robinson family agree to be responsible. We feel sure you will work hard to repay the loan."

The Jacobs family was overcome with joy and relief. They couldn't thank the other families enough. They turned to Nana and Nora. "It was horrible for you to expose what we were doing. But, in the end, we're glad you did. Thank you."

With that, Mr. Twinkle suddenly appeared. They again fastened into their seats and were transported back to the reopened pool. Nora was happy to have the day at the pool. She looked

at Mr. Twinkle as he was about to disappear. "Did you see that?" She asked Nana. "Mr. Twinkle winked at me!"