



The Kooky Museum of Mr. Glass

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 7+

One day when Mr. Robert's students leave after a busy day at school, a snow-white parrot flies up to the classroom window. The bird is carrying a newspaper with an ad inviting children to attend the art museum's special program, "Real and Pretend". Without thinking twice, Mr. Robert decides to take his students, and before long the curious and excited first-graders are crossing the art museum's doorstep. It soon turns out that the museum, which seemed boring at first, has quite a lot of mystery to it. The museum's director – Mr. Glass, who has a long green mustache – is just as mysterious himself. Will the children find out what is real and what is pretend?



Reading sample

VII

“The director was floating!” August whispered to Anna as they climbed the stairs behind Rene.

“What do you mean, “floating”?” Anna asked in bewilderment.

“Like, he flew! But he was sitting still, right up under the ceiling, when the teacher was talking!”

“I dunno,” Anna reckoned. “I bet you just saw wrong.”

“What’s wrong?” Rene asked, turning around suddenly. The twins stopped and stared at each other. “Nothing,” August mumbled hesitantly.

“Don’t lie—I heard what you said!” Rene protested. “It’s not polite to talk behind someone else’s back.”

“We weren’t talking about you,” Anna said.

“What were you talking about, then?” Rene demanded.

“It was the director,” August replied. “I saw him floating just below the ceiling.”

“Sure! What are you going to imagine next? A flying director! Did the rat fly, too?” Rene snorted.

“Rats don’t fly,” a voice snapped.

The children startled. Standing in the doorway to the hall was the rat Raffael, wiping a brush off with a tiny rag.

“What are you staring at?” he huffed. “Rats have better things to do than go wheeling around in the air. Flying is for birds and...” the rat scratched the back of his neck, “angels. Come on through!”

The children entered the hall and peered around. Hanging on the walls of the large, well-lit space were dozens of paintings in impressive frames. They mostly showed men in old-fashioned clothing and meek-looking women cradling babies. Others were of naked ladies with intricate hairdos, stretching out lazily under a tree, or of gentlemen in frock coats standing and chatting outdoors. The last painting they came upon showed little messy-haired angels. The heavenly creatures were chubby, as naked as carrots, and very innocent-looking.

“Hah, angels? Angels don’t exist! They’re make-believe,” Rene scoffed. “And angels who fly?” He laughed arrogantly, then suddenly plopped onto his bottom and grabbed his left knee. “Owww!”

Anna and August looked around, confused. Someone had thrown something at Rene. That’s when they noticed a red apple with tiny bite-marks lying on the ground. Rene stood up and kicked the apple. “Who on Earth...?” August wondered.

At that moment, the children heard giggling. The laughter sounded downright mean. They turned, and froze. The angels in the painting were sticking their tongues out at them.



X

“What if he’s right?” August whispered as they climbed to the next floor. “Maybe the angels really did get out of the painting because we looked at them. All thanks to our imagination!”

“Of course they didn’t!” Rene scoffed, though he didn’t sound as sure as before. “Real things don’t have to be imagined—you can see and touch them, just like that.”

“Not always,” Anna argued. “Teensy bugs and germs can only be seen through a microscope. Dad always says we only see a tiny part of the bigger world. And if you only believe in the things you see, then the world will stay an awfully small place.”

“I’m not talking about scientific things,” Rene said, stopping at the door to the third-floor hall.

Everything on the third floor was entirely different. The strange, colorful paintings looked like dreams seen in a fun-house mirror. Watches melting in sunshine, a fried egg on a wall, a man with a green apple floating in front of his nose... There wasn’t a noblewoman or king to be seen—everything was bizarre and turned around.

Rene’s eyes flitted from painting to painting, finally coming to rest on a blue one. “Well, take this, for instance! It’s as if it came out of a bad dream!”

The blue painting showed an unusual woman whose body was made of drawers. The smaller drawers were opened partway, and the largest extended from her chest. A second, weird individual was in the painting, too: one with tree branches growing out of her head. August wrinkled his nose. “Do you smell that?” he asked. “It’s almost like something’s burning...”

Anna and Rene sniffed the air. August was right—a cloud of smoke was suspended in the air, as if someone had lit a fire. Even so, there were no fireplaces here, much less any bonfire pits...

August gasped. In the blue background, behind the woman with the drawers, there was a white spot, and little ashen hoof prints were scurrying away from it. The tracks circled the woman, then went left and climbed over the edge of the frame. From there, they made their way down the wall, onto the floor, and scuttled away.

“Hurry!” August called out, and the children sprinted after the tracks. They led the kids along the wall, past the other paintings, and then took a left towards the toilets. The door to the restroom stood slightly ajar, and the prints darted through the narrow crack. Rene flung the door open... and froze. A tiny giraffe was standing on the rim of the sink, tugging at the faucet. The animal’s back was engulfed in flames, burning and crackling.

“What are you waiting for? Help me!” the giraffe barked. “Can’t you see I caught on fire?”

Anna ran to the sink, turned the knob, and the giraffe jumped in. The fire sizzled as the water doused the flames.

“Thanks—just in the nick of time,” the giraffe bubbled from the basin.

Rene stared with his mouth hanging open. “How’d you get here?”

“Running,” the giraffe said. “What’d you think, that I took the tram?”

“You... you’re from that painting!” Anna exclaimed. “We followed your tracks here.”

“Clever little bugs, you are!” the giraffe remarked, and turned the water off. “So, what’s the point of asking?”

Still, Rene wouldn’t drop the subject. “How’d you get out of the painting?”

The giraffe stared at Rene judgmentally. “As one always does—I climbed over the frame and leapt down. That sort of thing wouldn’t be necessary if I lived in a zoo, of course—everyone

would come to see me, oohing and aahing. But as soon as you're in a painting, no one believes you anymore. That's why I occasionally spend time down here, as ordinary as can be—even normal!" The giraffe sat on the edge of the sink and sighed. The children fell awkwardly silent.

"Do the others do that, too?" Anna finally asked. "We saw the angels... they were flying."

"Of course they do! What'd you think?" the giraffe said. "Angels by the flock, all kinds of kings, horses, the Madonna with child... even Adam and Eve take their snake for a walk on weekends."

"That's impossible..." Rene started to grumble, but caught himself.

The giraffe nodded sadly, nimbly stood up on the edge of the sink, and climbed down to the floor. Its tiny body slipped out through the doorway, leaving only a trail of little wet tracks.

"Impossible, impossible..." Anna echoed accusingly. "Look what you did, now! He got hurt and went back."

Rene bit his lip and swung the door open, but the giraffe had already disappeared. The children ran back to the painting.

The white spot had vanished. Standing in its place was the giraffe, gazing off into the distance.

