

The
Woodland
Adventures
of...



Matilda B.:

Mesmerizing muskrat/friend



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Magical Woodland Friends

Chapter 6

One very hot and steamy June morning, Lila, nana, and Lucas pulled on their mud-boots and headed north on Swinehart Road. They definitely did not need snowpants. They definitely did not need mittens. They definitely did not need warm, wool hats. They headed north wearing shorts, T-shirts, and boots, of course, to protect their feet in the woods. Nana commented, "that she never wanted to step on poison ivy or a snake... EVER!" Lila had never had a poison ivy rash and was grateful her boots would provide protection. Lucas had kindly reminded Lila to pack a water bottle just in case they became thirsty on their journey.

As they marched at the edge of the road - single file - their chattering voices soon turned to the topic of Matilda B. After the huge excitement, as well as trouble and distress, that Lila and her friend had recently endured at her five year old birthday, the whole story had come tumbling out. The story of how she had first met Matilda B and had

stepped on her tail had come tumbling out. The story of how she had discovered the stream-tunnel and had met the muskrat grandchildren had come tumbling out.

The story of her and Lucas sitting in Matilda B.'s home sipping tea and eating cookies had come tumbling out.

At first, Mommy and Daddy felt certain that Lila had created a story from her imagination... But when Lucas chimed in AND Larry and Julie spoke of witnessing a frightened, scampering muskrat racing across their yard last month... well, they knew that Lila's Woodland friend was very real and living in the woods along Swinchart Road !!!

And now, here they were, filled with enthusiasm at the thought of attending the annual Woodland Reunion hosted by Matilda B. herself. Anxious to introduce Lila and Lucas to all the woodland neighbors, she had mailed them an invitation and was thrilled with their response. She was also thrilled that they had agreed to come early to help with the preparations.

Lila and Lucas were grateful for Matilda B.'s invitation and could not contain the excitement bubbling up within them as they drew closer to the little blue door. Earlier that month Lila had inquired if Nana could come, too - as she loved to cook and decorate for parties "??".

"My-oh-my, YES!" Matilda B. had responded. "That would simply be Perfect!"

Of course, Daddy had also been invited, but insisted that someone must stay home with Mommy because one never knows for certain when a baby will decide to be born.

Lucas knocked on the little blue door - but, no response. And just as he attempted a second try, out of the creek and up the mud bank scampered a wet and frazzled Matilda B.

"My-oh-my... thank you all for coming," she quickly blurted out. "I was taking my morning bath, but stayed in a bit too long, I suppose... I just love the cool water!"

Nana just stared in amazement at the mustkrat

as she felt many questions welling up inside her. She could only nod her head and smile as she heard Lila's voice introducing her to Matilda Elizabeth Muskrat. Then, all of a sudden, Matilda B. began violently shaking her body... and her wet, furry body sent a shower of water towards Lila and Lucas. It was just something woodland animals do - they don't mean to be rude. Laughter danced through the woods as they begged Matilda B. to do it once again.

"My-oh-my... we certainly must get busy. Yes, we certainly must prepare for the Woodland Reunion at once!"

Matilda instructed.

Nana was assigned the job of stirring the large pot filled with pulled pork. Lila lovingly volunteered to make the homemade strawberry ice cream, as she had helped nana with this task before and felt quite confident. Lucas was busy neatly stacking the cooled chocolate chip cookies onto trays before Matilda asked him to. He remembered to wash his hands first, and even though

he strongly desired to eat one (or maybe two), he knew that Mommy would want him to practice good manners.

It proved quite a difficult task to stay focused on... as the chocolate chips smelled so delicious.

"Lucas, Lucas -" Matilda B. sweetly shouted. "Oh, please help me fill these clean pails with cool water. Everyone will be so thirsty... and we certainly do not serve pop at the Woodland Reunion!"

So Lucas turned his thoughts from the cookies and politely helped out with his next task. Meanwhile, Matilda B. was softly singing and gathering greens and radishes from her garden along the creek. She so loved serving delicious and healthy food to all of her friends. Her secret ingredient for her tasty salad was a generous sprinkling of honey roasted peanuts to add a tasty crunch. Lila and Lucas both finished their chores in a timely fashion. Next Matilda B. asked if they would fill the large yellow bowl with potato chips and then cover it with foil to keep the nasty flies away. Together the

children smiled very big smiles - for they so loved potato chips. Lila quietly wondered to herself why her friend would serve something unhealthy ... like potato chips. As swiftly as this task was accomplished, both children boldly swiped one potato chip to quickly munch.

Lucas' tummy began to growl and beckon him to swipe another chip... when... something caught his attention. Lila had also noticed - a small sweeping noise and a scurrying of tiny feet. Both children turned and noticed a small and very cute mouse busily sweeping a makeshift serving table. As they took a few steps forward, the sweeping stopped, the scurrying feet stopped - and the small and very cute mouse blinked her large round eyes and stared up at them.

"My-oh-my, I see that you've met my dear friend, Fiona," remarked Matilda B. in a cheerful tone. So the muskrat, the fieldmouse, and the two helpful children chatted together for a brief moment. "To work - to work!"

Our guests will soon arrive," remarked Matilda B. without hesitation. She instructed Lila to gather fragrant bouquets to decorate the serving table... as animals of the woods did NOT prefer balloons for decorations at gatherings. They did not prefer hearing the LOUD, SCARY, POP of balloons exploding here and there. Next, she handed Lucas a stack of quilts to lay out upon the grass to provide resting places for the guests. "Fiona will certainly help by scurry-ing and scamper-ing all about upon them to smooth out all of the wrinkles. And, I will stack the plates and cups next to nana's pulled-pork," stated Matilda with exhausted breaths.

No sooner had each finished their job - when the sound of tat-a-tat-tat came from the trees above. As Matilda stood back and admired the amazing scene, she noticed a most lovely banner. Yes, a most lovely banner was tied between the two willow trees at the edge of the creek. Slowly, she opened her mouth and quietly read...

"Every creature
in the forest is mine,
the wild animals on all the mountains.

I

know every mountain bird by name;
the scampering field mice are my friends"

Psalm 50:10
(from Lila)

Tat-a-tat-tat came the strange noise again.
Lila and Lucas looked at Matilda with a bit of
concern and she looked at them with love in her
heart for helping her accomplish a most wonderful
feast of food along with stunning decorations.
Oh Mr. Woodpecker was soon joined by an entire choir
of friends singing out their welcome song as the Woodland
Reunion had begun... TAT-A-TAT-TAT!!!!

Lila's concern melted into a joyful and twirling
little dance. Lucas was still a bit bewildered; he
wondered to himself... where was nana? Matilda B.

could read the expression on his face... and so leaned over to whisper into Lucas' ear that nana seemed a bit weary and decided to have a little rest inside Matilda's home.

As Lucas turned to venture towards Lila, a timid grey squirrel stepped beside him and offered a fist-bump (i mean a paw-bump). From that point on, Lucas merrily and bravely joined in greeting, eating, and enjoying each minute of the celebration. And Lila had already helped herself to two sandwiches and two large handfuls of potato chips!

"Quiet, now quiet everyone!" squeaked Matilda B. as she clapped her paws together. "There is a wonderful surprise today for my two new friends. Yes, a most wonderful surprise for Lila and Lucas... and here it is!"

Matilda B. scampered towards three old tree stumps just west of her little home. As she carefully climbed upon the one that held what appeared to be a miniature harp studded with tiny white pearls,

Lila and Lucas both shook their heads in disbelief. From the edge of the woods... heading straight towards the other two stumps... as real as could be... was DEEDEE AND FOXY!!!
Dee Dee and Foxy were alive - truly alive - smiling - waving - hopping - heading towards the stumps.

Matilda B. quickly explained that once a year (only once, mind you)... through the magic of Love... an animal (or two) could experience what it is like to be alive - truly alive!

And so, as Matilda B. played her harp, Dee Dee set a beautiful rhythmic beat on her gembay along with Foxy's expert fiddling skills... and oh the most glorious hymns floated through the woods all afternoon. Lila's ♥ was filled with love. Lucas' ♥ was filled with love, too! But Matilda B.'s ♥ was so full of love that she was about to burst into happy-tears.

As the reunion was nearing an end, Lila swiftly

stood and shared a verse from Psalm 115 that she had memorized that week:

Let God bless all who fear God —
bless the small,
bless the great.

And as the weary woodland friends shared their goodbyes, Dee Dee and Foxy scampered towards the woods west of Matilda B.'s home. Lucas was quick to point out that he could see two more rabbits AND two more foxes standing near the tall majestic pines.

"Yes, of course," Matilda B. offered in her sweet and tired voice. "You see, Dee Dee and Foxy needed adults to help guide them through the magical woodlands... and o, Grandma Lydia and Papa Jack Rabbit helped Dee Dee and Jan a and Pappy Fox helped Foxy. But when you return home tonight, you will most certainly find your friends neatly tucked into your beds... waiting for you. And Grandma and Papa and Pappy and Nana (who is your inseparable friend) will ALWAYS find nique ways to love and encourage you... for that is what

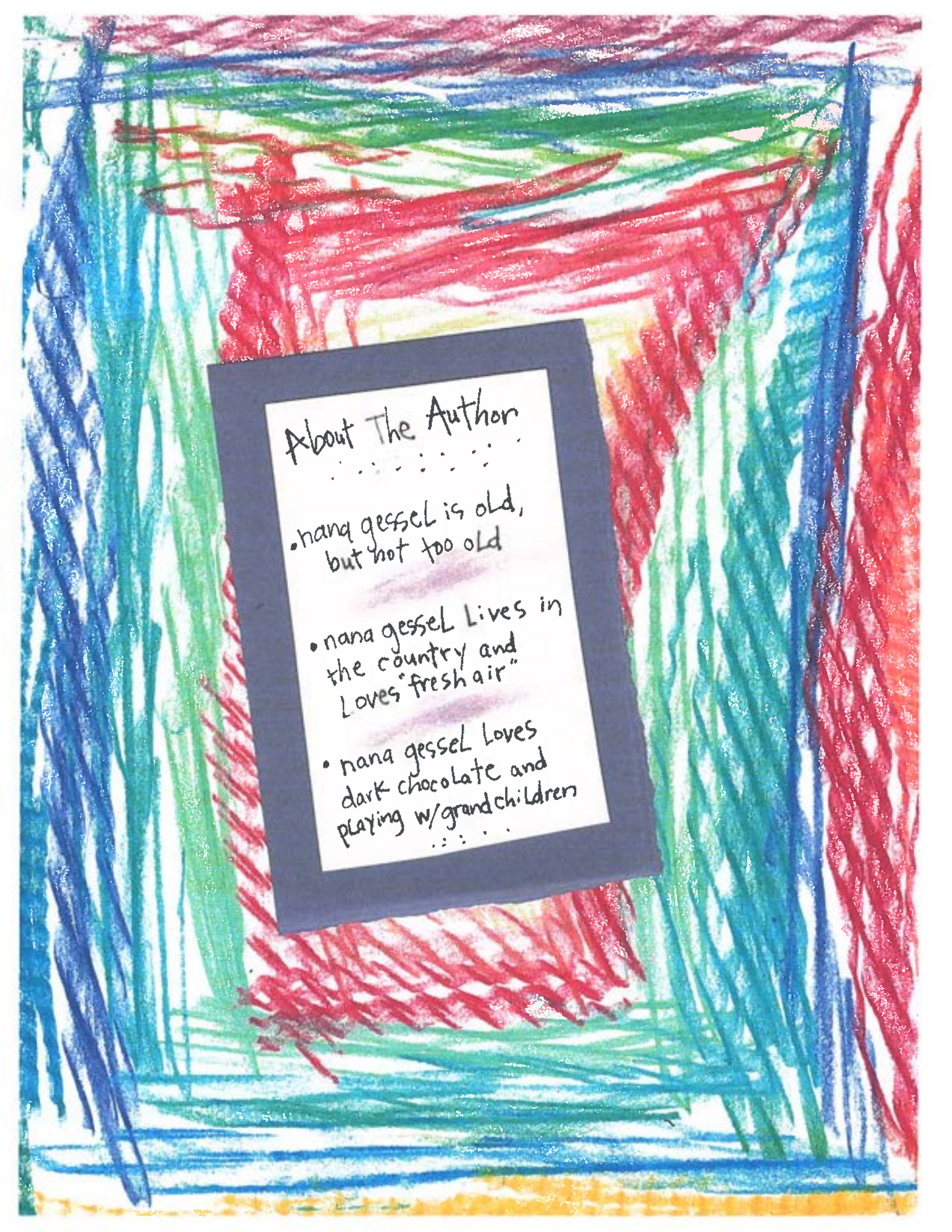
God intends for grandparents to do!"

And since Matilda B. herself is a grandmother... well... i'm certain she is correct, thought Lila as she gently hugged her friend good night.

Later, as Lila climbed into bed, she found Dee Dee waiting for her - just as Matilda B. had promised. In the darkness of her bedroom, Lila noticed that her rabbit's tummy seemed a bit larger than normal AND she was certain that she could hear little moans and little groans from the rodent, too. She guessed that it was probably too many dishes of strawberry ice cream earlier that day.

Lucas sleepily grabbed Fogy under his arm as Daddy tucked him in... and Strangely enough, Lucas was most certain that he could smell chocolate chip cookies as he tugged Fogy even closer.

The End



About The Author

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• nana gessel is old,
but not too old

• nana gessel Lives in
the country and
Loves "fresh air"

• nana gessel Loves
dark chocolate and
playing w/grandchildren
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