

The Problem With Phiddleberries

One of the many mysteries on the Island of Phiddle



Phineas Phiddlephaddle

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by

Phineas Phiddlephaddle



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This is a work of fiction. All the people, animals, islands, and events in this book came from my imagination.

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It was one of the many mysteries on the Island of Phiddle

Phineas Phiddlephaddle Is Not An Alias

I have recently learned that some readers of this fine publication are under the impression that my name is an alias. A pen name, a pseudonym, a sobriquet, a nom de plume, a nom de guerre.

Well, I can assure you that my name actually is Phineas Phiddlephaddle. Phiddlephaddle is a proud family name on the island of Phiddle, where I was born. It means a Phaddle from the isle of Phiddle. No one is quite sure what a Phaddle is. That information was lost over time, like many great historical mysteries. Still, we Phiddlephaddles are proud of the name none the less.

Phineas is a common given name in my time. And there is where the confusion may lie. The truth of the matter is, I am not of this time. I am a child of the early 20th century. I came to reside in the 21st century due to unrestrained curiosity on my part.

The island of Phiddle has a small population. Needless to say, everyone knows everyone quite well. One of the residents of Phiddle is Professor Tinkerhoffer. A delightful, curious soul with a penchant for inventing. Naturally, these fantastic inventions attract the attention of the residents of Phiddle. I am no exception.

One day as I was about, I noticed the professor's door was open, so I ventured in. Professor Tinkerhoffer was nowhere to be found, but a strange contraption was sitting in the middle of the workshop. The unusual device had many dials and pipes and gauges and a large padded chair. I couldn't resist, I took a seat.

Attached to the right arm of the chair was a lever. The lever had a note attached to it, with the words "Do not pull!" Naturally, I pulled. I suddenly found myself in 1971. As you can well imagine, I was shocked. I tried returning to my proper time but was unable to make the chair work again.

Eventually, I abandoned the effort. I have spent the past 49 years adjusting to this new era. I am comfortable here now but have never felt entirely at home.

Recently, I began writing tales of my old home. I have gathered them into this collection. I enlisted my good friend from this century, Mark Starlin, to publish the book. As he was the one who encouraged me to write it and knows how to bring a book into existence in this century.

I hope I have cleared up that misunderstanding. And more so, I hope you enjoy reading the tales of my beloved former home.

Good day.

Phineas Phiddlephaddle

The Problem With Phiddleberries

There is a berry that only grows on the Island of Phiddle called the Phiddleberry. The Phiddleberry is so delicious that it caused considerable discord between the humans and birds who called Phiddle their home.

Birds and humans loved the berries so much that there were never enough to go around. Wild Phiddleberries were eaten off the bushes by birds before humans could harvest any. Humans resorted to growing Phiddleberries in greenhouses to get a sizable enough crop for making Phiddleberry Jam, a favorite of all Phiddle residents.

Well, the birds of Phiddle didn't take kindly to this turn of events. Since birds have no farming skills to speak of, they were at the mercy of whatever the wild Phiddleberry bushes produced. Sadly, the bushes never seemed to grow enough berries to satisfy the birds' yearnings.

One day Rebecca Wellington was carrying a basket of Phiddleberries from the family greenhouse to the farmhouse. Suddenly, a hawk swooped down and snatched the basket from her hand, and flew away. You can hardly blame the bird. Phiddleberries are that delicious. And being a bird, it is in their nature to swoop down and grab food.

This wasn't an isolated incident. In fact, it was only the first salvo in an ongoing campaign of basket snatching by the birds. It became such a problem that the Mayor was enlisted to help.

The Mayor of Phiddle is, by default, the eldest resident of Phiddle. Folks figuring the oldest resident must be the wisest. Typically, there isn't much for the Mayor to do. Unless there is a disagreement that can't be worked out in a neighborly manner. Then the Mayor is consulted to make the final decision. Or if a big problem arises, as in this case, the Mayor attempts to resolve it.

The Mayor visited the Wellington family and enlisted the help of young Rebecca Wellington.

Rebecca was a six-year-old. Which means she could still speak fluent Hawk. Around age seven, the children of Phiddle begin losing their ability to talk to birds and animals. No one knows why. It simply happens that way.

The Mayor and the Wellington family walked out to the forest that the hawks, and many other birds, called their home. The Mayor was quite winded by the time they reached the forest (the Mayor really likes Phiddleberry Jam, and it shows.)

With the help of Rebecca translating, the Mayor met with the entire bird community on Phiddle.

“We realize you enjoy Phiddleberries, as do we. And that there are not enough wild Phiddleberries to go around. If you agree to quit snatching baskets of Phiddleberries from Phiddle humans, I will enact Phiddleberry Fridays. Every Friday, any resident of Phiddle growing Phiddleberries will be required to place a basket worth of Phiddleberries out for the birds of the field to enjoy. In return, birds will no longer raid greenhouses and snatch Phiddleberries from the residents,” said the Mayor.

The entire bird population agreed to the proposal, and there have been Phiddleberry Fridays

ever since. Folks put out tables so children and birds can eat together and enjoy some pleasant conversation. Parents make toast for the children to spread Phiddleberry Jam on, while birds preferred the berries in their natural state.

It's surprising how much children and birds have to talk about. It remains one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.

The Tree With No Top

On the island of Phiddle, deep in the woods, there is a tree that has no top. At least, that is what most of the island's residents think. Its trunk climbs higher than the clouds. Even on a sunny day, its top is not visible. The trunk simply fades out of sight.

The trunk itself is an oddity. Unlike most trees, it remains the same size as far as the eye can see. And the trunk is not as large as you might expect from an old tree. A 12-year-old boy can easily put his arms around it, but it rises higher than a young tree should. Higher than any tree should.

Winston Ferguson tried to climb the tree once. But as there are no visible branches, it was tiring work. After four hours, Winston slid back down to the ground.

I asked Winston if he had reached the top.

“No. I climbed high enough to see the entire island. What a view! The farmer's fields looked like painted tiles. I saw my lost sheep! I looked down on flying birds, yet the trunk continued upward with no

end in sight. My arms and legs could take no more, and I was getting light-headed, so I slid back down.”

The tree has been around for as long as anyone can remember. Once, I asked Archibald Handel, the island’s oldest resident, about it.

“That tree was there before I was born, and it looks exactly the same today as when I was a boy. Over the years, many have tried to climb it to see its top. All of them failed.

“Charles Bakerson got so obsessed with the mystery that he tried to chop it down. He broke two axes and earned several blisters for his trouble. Sometimes a mystery is best left unsolved. It gives you something to wonder about. If you knew what was at the top of that tree, it wouldn’t be nearly as interesting, now would it?”

I couldn’t argue with that.

I suppose someday someone will invent a way to climb it. Or perhaps someone will climb down from the top, maybe from another island. But for now, it remains one of the many mysteries on the Island of Phiddle.

Being Still

On the island of Phiddle, there lived a young man by the name of Jimmy Toocalm. Jimmy was a master at being still. Once he sat perfectly still on a log for so long, a bluebird built a nest on his head. The bird was none too pleased when Jimmy rose and walked away with his new family home. Jimmy quickly made amends by placing the nest in a tree with a pleasant view of the ocean and offering the bird a large quantity of Phiddleberrys.

Most folks found Jimmy's proclivity for immobility a particularly odd pastime. Before his penchant for stillness was well known, more than one Phiddle resident saw Jimmy lying immobile in a field and thought he had expired. They were rightly dismayed and then equally startled when he spoke up and informed them he was indeed alive. Jimmy was on the receiving end of a few choice words after that, I can assure you.

But soon, his abilities were old hat. He was like a statue in the town center that everyone except the birds ignored. Jimmy felt his gift was under-

appreciated. While being highly skilled at being still may be an admirable trait in children, it is rarely lucrative. Jimmy made the difficult decision to leave the Island of Phiddle.

Jimmy knew there were only two cities that would appreciate his unique talent, Paris and New York. He chose New York.

Professor Tinkerhoffer regularly flew his hot-air balloon to New York to procure invention supplies. He agreed to take Jimmy on his next trip. The professor was initially happy to have company on the journey, then became justifiably annoyed when Jimmy remained motionless and silent the entire trip.

Upon arrival in New York, Jimmy thanked the professor and set out to make his fortune. Confident that the cultured folks of New York City would be able to appreciate his unique gift. He got an apartment in an artsy neighborhood and enjoyed being around other creative people. Soon, however, he noticed that none of the artsy folk were very wealthy. In fact, most of them were quite poor, which made sense. If they were wealthy, they

wouldn't live in the run-down, ramshackle flats that abounded in their neighborhood.

The only one who ever seemed to have any cash on hand was a musician named Freddy Trainstop. Jimmy asked Freddy how he earned his money.

Freddy said, "That's an easy answer, mate. I'm a busker."

"What's a busker?" Jimmy asked.

"Ah, you must be new to the city. A busker is someone who performs for tips. I play my banjo and sing in the park, and people leave coins in my case."

With nothing to lose, Jimmy gave busking a try. He stood immobile in the park for four days straight but only got odd looks and four cents for his efforts.

As he walked back to his flat, deciding how to spend his last four cents, he passed by Macy's. He looked in the display window and saw a mannequin. A brilliant, although a quite unethical idea popped into his mind.

The following day, near closing time, Jimmy casually entered Macy's department store and

browsed the men's clothing department. He picked out a fine new suit and proceeded to the dressing room.

After putting on the suit, Jimmy walked back to the men's department. When no one was looking, he did what he does best and stood perfectly still. He made a fine-looking mannequin. Several customers passed by, and none were the wiser.

Before long, it was closing time, and the store emptied—except for Jimmy. Jimmy waited until dark then lit a candle and wandered the store looking for valuables. He collected several expensive pocket watches from the men's department and then went to the lady's jewelry section. There Jimmy found a jewelry case with several large diamond rings in it. *Jackpot!* he thought.

“Don't waste your time. They're fake.”

The voice startled Jimmy, and he dropped the candle. He quickly picked it back up and looked around but saw no one, only mannequins. He wondered. No, it couldn't be. He walked closer to one of the mannequins. It spoke again.

“That’s right, Doll. I’m alive,” the mannequin said. Only it wasn’t truly a mannequin. It was Betsy Posestriker. “I saw you in the park. You’re good. How long have you been practicing motionlessness?” she said.

“As long as I can remember. I started as a boy,” Jimmy replied.

“I figured. No one gets as still as you did without dedication. My name’s Betsy.”

“I’m Jimmy. You are quite good as well.”

“Thanks, Love. So you plan to clean out the store tonight?”

“It was my intention, but I am happy to share. There is enough for both of us.”

“That’s a fool’s plan. You do that, and tomorrow night this place will be crawling with security guards. Sure, you could hit several stores, but word gets around. And how are you going to fence those watches and jewels you’re taking?”

“I hadn’t thought about that. I guess I would pawn them,” Jimmy replied.

“No legitimate pawnbroker is going to buy expensive watches from the likes of you. They will know they were stolen, and you will get caught.”

“What do you suggest?”

“I like you. You got talent. And you’re smart enough to listen to reason. And seeing how we are birds of a feather, I am going to let you be my partner. Working together, we can get rich—filthy, stinking rich like them bankers living in their penthouses. But we gotta be smart about it. We only take one item per store, and we hit a different store each night. They will chalk it up to shoplifting, or inventory errors, or employee theft. I already got a fence I been working with for six months.”

Jimmy was a little dumbfounded. And a little in love. He took Betsy up on her offer.

Betsy’s plan worked flawlessly. Jimmy and Betsy got rich. They spent years living in a penthouse overlooking the park. Occasionally, Jimmy would still go busking. Not for money, but for the love of stillness.

Eventually, homesickness got the best of Jimmy, and he moved back to the Island of Phiddle. He took his bride Betsy with him. Betsy loved her new home and soon fit right in. She learned to make Phiddleberry jam and became known across the island for her Phiddleberry pie. Most folks said it was the best they ever tasted.

Jimmy and Betsy started spending their money on things that needed doing on Phiddle. They put up a new barn for old man Plowhand. They built a fire station and had a fire wagon shipped in from New York. The couple bought school supplies and new desks for the school. They were generous beyond any expectation.

When folks on Phiddle asked them how they could afford such things (a legitimate question, seeing how they spent most of their day standing motionless instead of working,) Jimmy would tell them the story of their thievery in New York. And that they moved back to Phiddle to escape justice. To which Betsy always replied, “Nonsense. My Daddy made a fortune in the stock market. I inherited it when he passed.”

Whether Jimmy or Betsy was telling the truth, no one can confidently say. It remains one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.

Singing Animals

It was Phiddleberry Friday. Children were enjoying their weekly Phiddleberry feast with the birds of the air. Since Phiddle children under the age of seven can still speak to animals and birds, they were also enjoying some pleasant conversation. Usually, this conversation involves questions like, “What is it like to fly?” or, “Why do you play with small wooden boats.” But on this Phiddleberry Friday, the conversation took a surprising turn.

A hawk named Joey — actually, that wasn’t really his name. Bird names are hard for humans to pronounce, so the children just called him Joey — told Reginald Dooropener about an animal that sang to him.

“I was flying over Phiddle Mountain when I looked down and saw a warble. To my surprise, it stood up on its hind legs and began to sing. I thought it a curious thing, so I circled back around,

and it did it again. Now every time I fly over a warble, it rises and sings, Joey said.”

“What is a warble?” Reginald asked.

“A warble is an animal that lives only on top of Phiddle Mountain. It has shaggy fur, long legs, and long ears.”

“And it can sing?”

“Oh, yes. I thought songbirds were good singers, but the warble sings the most beautiful melodies I have ever heard. Their singing is even more beautiful than the singing of Rachel Mellifluous.”

[Rachel Mellifluous is considered the island’s best singer. She often brings tears of emotion to her listeners when she sings.]

“What do they sing?”

“That is the problem. I only speak hawk. I cannot understand the words of the song. How I would love to know what they are singing.”

“Perhaps I could translate for you.”

“That would be marvelous. Except, as you know, Phiddle Mountain is shaped like a stovepipe hat. No

adult human has ever climbed it. A child would have no chance. And you are too heavy for me to fly you up there.”

“I will ask Professor Tinkerhoffer to fly me up there in his hot-air balloon,” Reginald said.

“Do you think he would?” Joey replied.

“I don’t see why not? I shall go right after I finish my toast and Phiddleberry jam.”

Reginald entered Professor Tinkerhoffer’s workshop and found the old man working on his latest invention.

“Reginald, my boy. Look what I have invented. I call it The Pancake Griddle Hat. It’s quite simple in conception. I simply added a metal plate to a standard bowler hat. Before I go on my morning walk, I add a few dollops of pancake batter to the top of the hat. By the time I return, the sun has cooked the pancakes to a nice golden brown texture. I am just now installing the syrup dispenser. Would you care to join me on my walk?” the Professor asked.

“Normally, I would be happy to join you on a walk. But today, I have come to ask a favor.”

“A favor? How curious. What is it you seek?”

“A ride in your hot-air balloon. You see, I was talking to Joey the hawk this morning, and he told the most wonderful story about an animal called a warble that lives on top of Phiddle Mountain. He says the warbles sing to him whenever he flies over. He would like me to listen to the songs they sing and translate them for him.”

“Well, that is astounding. Even more astounding is the fact that I never thought to visit the top of Phiddle Mountain in my hot-air balloon. Sometimes I get so wrapped up in inventing that I fail to see the wonders all around me. I must remedy that oversight.”

“So you will take me?”

“Of course! It sounds like a fine adventure. Singing creatures on top of Phiddle Mountain? Astounding. You must seek your parent’s permission. Perhaps one of them would like to join us. We will leave in the morning when the air is

cool. Run home now, lad. There is much to prepare.”

The following morning, the sun shone brightly, and the temperature was cool and refreshing. Reginald and his father, Arthur, arrived at the Professor’s workshop excited to begin their adventure.

“Good morning, Professor!” Arthur called out as they approached. “A beautiful day for flying, is it not?”

“It is indeed,” the Professor replied.

The Professor had decided to wear his Pancake Griddle Hat to test how it worked at higher altitudes.

Arthur and the Professor got the hot-air balloon filled with heated air, and the three of them climbed aboard. The Professor opened the burner, and the balloon began to rise. If you have never ridden in a hot-air balloon, you must be sure to put it on your priority list. For it is a wonderful thing.

They slowly and silently climbed higher and higher into the sky. The Professor was an excellent balloon pilot and soon found favorable winds to steer them toward Phiddle Mountain.

Professor Tinkerhoffer never tired of flying his hot-air balloon and was happy for an excuse to go for another ride. Arthur and Reginald were also having a splendid time. Arthur was pointing out landmarks as they flew across the island toward their destination.

After a pleasant journey, they reach the top of Phiddle Mountain. The top of the mountain was surprisingly flat, with many open areas to land. They had no trouble finding a spot to put down. They grew closer and closer to the ground, and with a slight bump, they landed. The balloon basket dragged for a few feet. Then as the balloon deflated and fell to the ground, it pulled the basket over onto its side. This is the usual way of things with hot-air balloons. They climbed out of the basket, stood up, and looked around.

The Professor looked down and saw three pancakes lying on the ground. “Oh, dear. It seems I

forgot to consider the landing when I decided to wear my Pancake Griddle Hat.”

“Have no fear, Professor. We packed some toast and Phiddleberry jam in case we got hungry,” Reginald said.

“Clever lad.”

They packed up the balloon and stowed it next to an unusually large rock so they could find it easily on their return. Then they enjoyed a delicious slice of toast and jam. As they were almost finished eating their toast, Joey, the hawk landed.

Reginald offered Joey some Phiddleberries, which he eagerly accepted, and then they had a short conversation.

“Joey will circle the top of the mountain. When he finds a warble, he will cry out and continue to circle. We can use him as our guide. He thinks we should try to remain out of sight so the warbles won’t get nervous and be too frightened to sing. They have never seen a human up close, only from an extreme distance looking down from the edge of the mountain.”

“A fine plan,” the Professor said.

Arthur agreed.

Joey flew over the mountain top and soon spotted a warble. As usual, it rose on its hind legs and began to sing. Joey cried out and circled. The trio of adventurers heard the cry and headed in its direction.

As they crept closer, crawling on their bellies in the tall grass, they noticed that several warbles had joined together and were all standing and singing to Joey.

“Astounding.” Professor Tinkerhoffer whispered.

“Truly,” Arthur whispered back.

Reginald stared in wonder. Then he remembered he was supposed to translate. He pulled a small notebook and pencil out of his pocket and wrote down the song’s lyrics.

Great bird in flight

We envy the sight

As you gracefully glide on the wind

Free to go where you will

*Not stuck on this hill
Oh, how we wish we had wings
Our home is quite fair
But we see lands down there
Enticing lands where we may never go
Your freedom is rare
A gift we wish we could share
If only we had your strong wings*

Reginald showed the lyrics to his father and Arthur. Then he shouted out something in hawk. At which, Joey returned. Reginald read the lyrics to Joey. Upon hearing the verses, Joey was deeply touched and said something to Reginald.

“Professor, Joey wonders if it would be possible to bring the warbles down in your hot-air balloon?” Reginald said.

“We are of the same mind, as I was thinking the very same thing,” the Professor replied.

“Perhaps you and Joey should approach them together. The Professor and I will watch from a distance. So as not to overwhelm them,” Arthur said.

So Joey stood on Reginald's shoulder, and they slowly approached the warbles. As they did, Reginald sang a song of greeting in the warble language. The warbles sang a greeting in return and welcomed them. After a few moments of nervousness, they became quick friends. Reginald explained the situation, and the Professor's offers to fly the warbles down to the island below.

"I have dreamed of such a thing for my entire life," the eldest warble replied. "I would be most grateful."

It was agreed that they would take the elder warble, whose name was translated as Fluffears, down with them that day for a visit. He would report his findings back to the warbles. Then they could decide if they wished to become lower island dwellers.

The entire warble population, which numbered about two hundred, followed the three humans and the hawk back to the balloon. They prepared the balloon for another trip, and the four of them climbed in. Joey had no need for a balloon and flew down on his own.

Fluffears spent the morning with the trio as they toured the island. He was both amazed and overwhelmed.

“So much noise. Is it is always this loud down here?” Fluffears sang.

“Usually. Humans are quite loud,” Reginald replied. “And some are louder than others.” He looked at the Professor and laughed.

“What did you say?” the Professor asked.

“Oh, I just told him your inventions were occasionally noisy.”

“I can’t argue with that,” the Professor replied.

“What do humans eat?” Fluffears asked.

“Vegetables, berries, pie, the usual stuff,” Reginald sang.

“What about warble roots?”

“Never heard of them.”

“Warble nuts?”

“I don’t think they grow down here.”

“Surely you have Warbleberries? They are our favorite food.”

“Nope. We do have Phiddleberries. You should try some.”

And so they did. The group sat at the picnic table at Jimmy and Betsy Toocalm’s house and dined on some of Betsy’s prize-winning Phiddleberry pie.

“It is quite tasty, but I prefer Warbleberries. And I hope you don’t take offense, but what is that unusual smell?”

“You are probably smelling the sheep and goats. They can be stinky. Unlike warbles, I noticed.”

“Thank you. We warbles take care to bathe in the streams regularly. And the mountain air keeps us smelling fresh. I also noticed it is quite warm down here. I have been sweating ever since we arrived.”

“The temperature at the top of the mountain is much cooler. This is only spring. It will get even hotter.”

“Hotter?! I can’t imagine it,” Fluffears sang.

After a full day of visiting the island, Fluffears was given the guest room at the Dooropener farmhouse. They shared stories of each other's lives late into the night. The next morning, the Professor, Reginald, and Grace — Reginald's mother — flew Fluffears back to the top of the mountain.

Fluffears told the warbles of his adventure and all that he had learned.

Fluffears decided the island floor was an exciting place to visit. Still, it paled in comparison to the beautiful views, cool air, and delicious food only found on top of Phiddle Mountain. So he chose to remain in their current warble home. However, he hoped that each warble would have an opportunity to visit the low lands and decide for themselves.

The Professor agreed that this was a wise decision. So the Professor shuttled all the warbles down, four at a time, until all the warbles had visited the low lands. In the end, the warbles all agreed that the top of the mountain was indeed a better place for warbles to live. The folks of the low lands understood and took no offense.

The Professor still visits the top of Phiddle Mountain once every month to bring warble guests down for day visits. At the same time, he brings Phiddle humans up to see the top of the mountain and spend the day with the warbles and enjoy the views.

How did warbles get to the top of Phiddle Mountain in the first place? No one knows. It remains one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.

The Bird Who Was Afraid To Fly

If you take a walk through the woods on the island of Phiddle, you will notice that the trees are filled with music. The music of songbirds happily singing. Songbirds on Phiddle take great pride in their songs. They work hard to create beautiful melodies and practice their craft daily. There was one songbird, however, who didn't join the others in the trees. Not because she didn't sing, but because she didn't fly.

When Stroller was a baby bird, she fell out of her nest, which is not an uncommon occurrence among birds. Most survive by flapping their tiny wings and slowing the fall. Usually, little harm is done. But the fall scared Stroller so badly that she refused to even try flying afterward. Despite her parent's best efforts to encourage her, Stroller spent her youth hopping along on the ground.

One Phiddleberry Friday, Stroller happened to hop up on the picnic table across from Annabel Cartwheel. As they enjoyed their Phiddleberrys and Phiddleberry jam, they struck up a conversation.

“I noticed that you hopped all the way across the yard and up onto the table. Can’t you fly?” Annabel asked Stroller.

“I don’t know. I have never tried,” Stroller replied.

“Why not?”

“I am worried that if I fly, I might fall out of the sky.”

“But you are a bird. You won’t fall.”

“I would rather stay safe here on the ground.”

“Well, if I were a bird, I would fly all the time. I imagine it must be very exciting.”

“Perhaps, but I will never fly.”

Being polite, Annabel changed the subject. But she couldn’t stop thinking about it.

That afternoon Annabel paid a visit to Professor Tinkerhoffer.

“Good afternoon, Professor. I wonder if you could make something for me?”

“Good afternoon to you, Annabel. What would you like me to make?”

“A helmet for a bird.”

“My goodness. That is an unusual request. Why would a bird need a helmet?”

“I met a bird today who is afraid to fly. I thought maybe a helmet would give her some courage.”

The Professor chuckled and said, “While it is a thoughtful idea — and I admit I would very much like to see a bird wearing a helmet — the fact is, birds are balanced for flight. A helmet would add too much weight to her head and make flight extremely difficult or impossible. But I have an idea that might help. Let’s take the bird up in my hot-air balloon. Once she sees how wonderful it is to fly, I am sure she will want to do it on her own.”

“That is a brilliant idea, Professor. When can we go?”

“Tomorrow morning, when the air is cool. Invite your parents, gather your bird friend, and meet me here at 7:30 am.”

“I will. Thank you, Professor.”

The following morning, Annabel and her mother arrived carrying a basket containing a hearty breakfast.

“Good morning, Professor,” Lillian Cartwheel said. “I brought breakfast. It wouldn’t do to fly on an empty stomach.”

“Good morning to you. You are a woman of remarkable insight. Your Henry was a clever man to win your hand.”

“Now you stop that, you old charmer,” Lillian said with a smile.

A few minutes later, Stroller came bouncing down the path.

Annabel greeted Stroller and invited her to join them for breakfast. Annabel had brought some Phiddleberrys for Stroller to eat. After a delightful breakfast, the Professor and Lillian prepared the

balloon for flight. Soon they were floating up high into the sky.

Stroller was wide-eyed during the ascent. She began singing, and Annabel translated.

“Oh, this is wonderful,” Stroller says.

“You know you could do this on your own,” the Professor said, and Annabel translated.

“Oh, no. I could never fly on my own. I do not know how,” Stroller replied.

After a pleasant morning floating around the island, seeing the sights, they landed in the field next to the Professor’s workshop.

Stroller sang again. “I greatly enjoyed that, Professor. Might we go again another day?”

“Absolutely. I plan to take another flight on Tuesday to try out an invention I am working on. You are welcome to join me.”

“I will be here,” Stroller replied via Annabel.

“Annabel, can you join us on Tuesday to translate?” the Professor asked.

Annabel looked at her mother.

“Of course, Dear. I love balloon rides. And I am curious to see what the Professor’s invention might be,” Lillian said.

The weekend and Monday passed without much excitement, and before long, it was Tuesday. When Annabel and her mother arrived at the Professor’s workshop, they were surprised and delighted to see a miniature, bird-sized hot-air balloon sitting next to the Professor’s full-sized balloon.

“Oh, it’s adorable!” Annabel said.

“How clever, Professor. And absolutely charming,” Lillian said.

“Thank you, ladies. I thought, since Stroller refuses to fly under her own power, I would make another way for her to fly. A way that that would be less demanding on my time and balloon.”

“Brilliant,” Lillian said.

“I also thought since I will be teaching Stroller how to fly a hot-air balloon that I might as well teach the both of you at the same time. It would be

good to have more than one balloon pilot on the island. In fact, I may start a flying school.”

“How exciting. That’s a wonderful idea, Professor,” Annabel said.

Stroller arrived a moment later and bounced around with great joy. She was singing so quickly that Annabel had a hard time translating fast enough.

“Annabel, Stroller will need the assistance of a human to get her hot-air balloon airborne. Are you willing to be her ground crew?” Professor Tinkerhoffer asked.

“I am!” Annabel answered.

“Very well, then we may proceed.”

The four of them spent half the day learning how to prepare and fly a hot-air balloon. Stroller’s balloon was a little different. Since Stroller had no hands to operate the burner, the Professor made a tiny rope that Stroller could pull with her beak. They made several successful test flights with the balloons tethered to the ground. Stroller appeared to be a natural balloon pilot.

Two more days of lessons and test flights followed. Then on Friday, Stroller made her first solo flight. The Professor followed her in his balloon to keep an eye on her. Several birds flew nearby to offer Stroller encouragement. It was a successful flight. When they landed, many humans and birds were waiting to congratulate Stroller on becoming an official balloon pilot.

Stroller became an excellent balloon pilot and was often seen floating through the sky in her hot-air balloon. The first time they saw it, Phiddle residents marveled at the sight of a bird flying a hot-air balloon. When asked about the sighting, those in the know enjoyed saying, “It is simply one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.”

One Way Cave

The island of Phiddle has many mysteries. Like its location. Oddly, the island disappeared from every map in the early 1900s. Some outside folks say Phiddle sank into the ocean, like Atlantis. Phiddle residents don't buy into this theory.

Most locals are convinced that Professor Tinkerhoffer created a device that somehow hides the island from ships and aircraft. Although he is an inventor, it is well-known that the professor despises the industrial revolution. The professor wants his beloved Phiddle to remain industry-free. And it has.

That is not to say that folks on Phiddle are not industrious — they are. But they mainly toil with their hands farming, making furniture, clothing, or Phiddleberry jam.

If you were to ask Professor Tinkerhoffer if he hid the island, he would harrumph the notion and respond with, "That's preposterous. A silly rumor, no more." Which would be followed by a twinkle in

his eye and the slightest upward curl of his mouth that would make you question the truth of his response.

Now, before you start asking what all this has to do with the cave in this story's title, the answer is not much. Other than it is a mystery, and I thought you might like to know. Well, onto the cave.

If you are not already aware, Mt. Phiddle is a commanding mountain, rising high above the Island of Phiddle. It is shaped much like a stovepipe hat. On the far side of the mountain, there is a cave. Actually, there are several, but there is one particular cave that Phiddle residents call One Way Cave.

Since there are no bears on Phiddle, it is generally safe to go into caves. Adventurous children often do and tell tales of pirates and buried treasure. But One Way Cave isn't like the other caves. It is a mystery.

If you enter One Way Cave, do some exploring, and then turn around and exit the cave, it will seem like any other cave. However, if you enter One Way

Cave and keep walking, a most unusual thing happens.

The cave interior runs in a straight line. If you try to find where the cave ends, you will have walked for roughly 45 minutes. Yet you will not find it's end. Instead, you will find yourself exiting the very same cave opening you entered. It doesn't matter if you stop and turn around or keep walking; you always end up leaving out of the same cave entrance. There seems to be no end to the cave inside.

Reginald Dooropener, in a fit of cleverness, once took a large ball of string with him into the cave and unrolled it as he walked. He walked in a straight line, never turning or wavering from his path. Sure enough, he exited out the same cave entrance he entered, finding the beginning of his string lying on the ground. He began winding up the string into a ball. When he finished, the ball of string was twice as long as when he started.

Reginald thought he might have stumbled onto a profitable business, but there really wasn't that much demand for string on Phiddle. Nevertheless, his mother was set for string for a very long time.

When professor Tinkerhoffer heard the tale, folks could practically see his mind spinning with excitement at the possibilities.

I suppose most folks would be astounded at finding such a cave. But there are many other equally mysterious things on Phiddle, so residents take it in stride. One Way Cave simply remains one of the many mysteries on the Island Of Phiddle.

The Bird Who Crashed Her Hot-Air Balloon

Stroller was a bird who was afraid to fly. But thanks to the kindness of Professor Tinkerhoffer, who built her a bird-sized hot-air balloon, Stroller learned to fly the skies in her balloon. She was quite an accomplished balloon pilot.

Her human friend, Annabel Cartwheel, was her ground crew. Annabel helped Stroller get her balloon filled and ready to fly. The process didn't take long, as the balloon was rather small. And she carried the balloon home after flights while Stroller told Annabel all that she had seen from the sky.

“I saw Winston Ferguson out on the hills with his sheep. I drifted down close and sang a little to get his attention. He looked up and waved. Then he backed into one of his sheep and took a tumble backward over it. He laid flat on his back and shouted, ‘I’m all right!’ We both laughed.”

“Oh, how funny! I wish I had seen that.”

One Thursday, Annabel helped Stroller get airborne as usual. But there was nothing ordinary about this particular balloon flight. The winds were calm when Stroller took off, but they soon picked up and lifted Stroller high up in the sky. Soon she was flying higher than she had ever flown and was headed straight for Mt. Phiddle.

Higher and higher she climbed, with no control over the ascent. When the winds finally let up, Stroller was just above Mt. Phiddle. To her dismay, the balloon started falling. She pulled on the rope that opened the burner and heated the air in the balloon, but it was no use. Stroller and her balloon crashed on top of Mt. Phiddle. The balloon deflated and got snagged in a group of Warbleberry bushes.

Several warblers saw Stroller crash and quickly came to check on her. Stroller was unhurt, but her balloon was in a sorry state. She had little hope of getting it flying again. She was stuck.

Fortunately, Stroller was under six years of age in bird years, so she could still talk to other animals. A warbler named Moppyback was the first to arrive on the scene.

“Are you hurt, tiny bird?” Moppyback asked.

“I believe I am unhurt,” Stroller replied.

“What is your name?”

“Stroller.”

“I am Moppyback. I am glad you are unhurt.”

Soon other warblers arrived. Stroller forgot about her balloon for a moment and marveled at the warblers.

“Are you warblers? I have heard the stories about the singing animals on the top of Mt. Piddle. But I have met any.”

“Yes, we are warblers. Welcome to our home,” Moppyback replied.

Stroller remembered her balloon and hopped over to the Warbleberry bushes where the balloon was lying.

“I am afraid warbleberry bushes have many thorns. I fear your balloon may have several tears,” Moppyback said.

“What will I do now?”

“Fear not, tiny bird. You are welcome to stay with us until Professor Tinkerhoffer makes this monthly run. We have plenty of Warbleberries, Warblenuts, and Scrungies to eat.”

“Thank you, Moppyback. You are very kind. What are Scrungies?”

“Scrungies grow under the ground. We dig them up and mash them. They are delicious.”

Stroller took the warblers up on their offer of hospitality and accompanied them back to their village.

As they sat down for a traditional dinner of scrungies and warbleberries, Moppyback asked Stroller about her balloon.

“We have looked down and seen your balloon flying, but we assumed it was some kind of toy. How is it that a bird like yourself possesses and flies a hot-air balloon?”

“The professor made it for me.”

“But why? Surely a bird has no need for a balloon.”

“The truth of the matter is, I am afraid to fly. I don’t know if I even can. I have never tried to. The professor made me a balloon of my own, so I could fly like he does.”

“Ingenious.”

Stroller took a nibble of some scrungies and found the taste of them quite unusual and not to her liking. But she politely ate some more. Then she ate some warbleberries. They were much better tasting than scrungies, but not nearly as good as Phiddleberries, in her opinion. She grew a little sad, thinking she would likely miss Phiddleberry Friday this week.

After dinner, the warblers treated Stroller to a concert. They sang beautifully. Stroller tried to join them as best she could, not knowing the words. Around the third song, Joey the Hawk landed and approached Stroller.

“There you are. Annabel is quite worried about you. You have never been gone this long. She sent me to look for you.”

“I am sorry for your trouble. A mighty wind carried my balloon up here, and I crashed. I am

stuck here. Would you ask Professor Tinkerhoffer to come and rescue me in his hot-air balloon?”

“He is off on a supply run to New York City. He won’t be back for two weeks.”

“Oh, dear. I will miss two Phiddleberry Fridays. Would you carry me down?”

“Certainly not. You can fly down yourself. You are a bird, after all.” Joey said. Then he turned and flew away.

Stroller was stunned. She didn’t know what to do. As much as she enjoyed singing with the warblers, she didn’t want to spend two weeks eating scrungies.

“Let’s go for a walk,” Moppyback said.

“All right,” Stroller replied.

They walked through grassy fields, past scrungie patches, and wound up next to a wide stream.

“This stream runs across the top of Mt. Phiddle and ends in a waterfall that falls the entire distance of Mt. Phiddle. As a young warble, I was afraid to cross this stream. But the best Warblenuts trees are on the other side. One day, all my friends crossed

the stream, but I was too scared. They asked me if I was coming across, and I said I didn't want any Warblenuts. Which was a lie. My fear of crossing the stream was ruining my life, and it was unnecessary. The stream is not deep, and warblers are natural swimmers. I just needed to trust my instincts. Several weeks later, I took a deep breath and waded into the stream. I crossed it with no problem. I felt a huge relief that I had conquered my fear."

Moppyback didn't wait for a reply and walked away. Stroller followed. As they walked, Stroller thought about the story Moppyback just told. She wondered if her fear of flying was unnecessary. She was a bird, after all. Could she trust her instincts like Moppyback did?

Before long, they reached the edge of the mountain. Stroller and Moppyback both looked down, then looked at each other.

"You can do it. You were born to fly," Moppyback said.

"You really think so?" Stroller asked.

"As sure as warblers are born to sing."

Stroller looked over the edge again, then back at Moppyback, who just smiled and nodded.

Stroller took a deep breath and jumped. Her heart pounded wildly at first, and she fell a short distance. Then she instinctively opened her wings. The air caught her wings, and she began to fly! She was a little shaky at first, but soon she found herself turning and soaring with ease.

Why didn't I do this sooner? She thought.

Stroller spent the next half hour enjoying her newfound ability. She was happier than she had ever been.

Eventually, she landed at Annabel's house. Annabel saw her land and came running.

"Did you see? I can fly!" Stroller said.

"I did. I am so happy for you!" Annabel replied.

The next morning, Stroller flew to Phiddleberry Friday. Everyone cheered, and they gave Stroller an extra helping of Phiddleberries.

Stroller no longer needed a hot-air balloon to fly,
and the mystery of the bird in the tiny hot-air
balloon on the Island of Phiddle soon faded away.

The Seemingly Bottomless Hole That Wasn't

On Phiddle, children make their own fun. This often involves exploring. The Island of Phiddle abounds with things to explore.

One delightful afternoon, Chester Lookabout and Adeline Joyspinner were out exploring when they happened upon a large hole. There his nothing particularly unusual about finding a hole on the Island of Phiddle, but this one had stairs.

Circular stairs led down the outside wall of the hole as far as the eye could see.

Adeline looked at Chester and asked, “Do we dare?”

“Why, of course, Adeline. I consider it my duty. We have discovered stairs circling a hole leading into the unknown. We must learn where they go so we can report our findings. It may be interesting to report the finding of an unusual hole. But how much more interesting would it be to know where the stairs lead?”

“As usual, you have made a compelling case. Let’s proceed.”

So the two children began the long descent down the staircase. Fortunately, they had both packed Phiddleberry jam sandwiches in their backpacks for their adventure. The sandwiches were eaten long before they reached the bottom. At long last, the stairs ended with little fanfare at a wooden door.

Adeline used the knocker to knock on the door. There was no response.

“I do hope someone is home. It has been a very long way down. It would be quite disappointing if it were all for nothing.”

“Let me try,” Chester said.

Chester banged on the door with considerable force. A few moments later, the door opened inward, and standing before them was an old man.

“Oh my, visitors. I haven’t had visitors in ever so long,” said the old man. “My name is Bernard Smallholder.”

“I am Chester Lookabout.”

“And I am Adeline Joyspinner.”

“I am ever so pleased to meet you both. Come on in, please.”

Adeline and Chester could hardly believe their eyes. As they walked through the door, they entered a vast underground cave—actually, more of a vast underground world. There were glowing stones in the cave ceiling that provided light as bright as a summer day. Looking around, they saw a farm, a lake, and cave-dwelling animals that looked a bit like goats.

“What is this place?” Adeline asked.

“Why, it is my home,” Bernard replied.

“What is its name?” Chester asked.

“I never thought to give it one,” Bernard answered.

“Did you make the stairs leading down here?” Adeline asked.

“I did indeed. I was a farmer when I lived up top. Still am, actually. One day I saw a deep hole in the ground. I tried using a rope to climb down, but no

matter how much rope I used, I couldn't reach the bottom.

I hate to admit it, but it became a bit of an obsession for me. I had to know what was at the bottom. So I decided to cut stairs around the hole to see where it led. It took months. Or maybe years. My memory is a bit foggy. Anyway, by the time I got to the bottom, I was too tired to climb back out. There was food and water and animals. I had no family and didn't mind being alone. So I stayed."

"How long ago was that?" Chester asked.

"Who can say? You can't see the sun down here, so I have no way of telling night from day. But I was a young man when I started cutting steps. Now I have a gray beard."

"Why haven't we seen you before?" Adeline asked.

"Well, it is quite a lot of stairs! Especially going up. I went back up once. But decided I liked it better down here. There are no storms or droughts, and water drips right off the ceiling onto the crops. It is easy farming."

“That’s a wonderful story. I think it would be marvelous if you told it to everyone in person. I am sure they would be as fascinated as I was. Would you like to accompany us back to the top?” Adeline said.

“Well, I wouldn’t mind seeing the old farm again. And sunshine. If you don’t mind my slower pace, I would be happy to join you on your return trip. We should pack some food and water for the climb. It is a doozie. And I’ll need my walking stick.”

It was a long climb, indeed. But the Chester, Adeline, and Bernard finally reached the top. As they walked through the village, the children introduced Bernard to everyone they met. None of them remembered old Bernard. And he didn’t recognize any of the village folk. Although he thought some looked familiar.

“Do you remember where your old farm is?” Chester asked.

“Of course. It’s not far.”

When they reached the farm, Adeline and Chester recognized it immediately as the farm of Ella and Edward Grower. They walked up to the farmhouse and knocked on the door. Ella came to the door.

“Good afternoon, Chester and Adeline,” Ella said.

“Good afternoon,” they both said.

“This is Bernard Smallholder. He used to own this farm,” Adeline said.

“Truly? That hardly seems likely. Edward and I inherited it from his parents, who inherited it from their parents.”

“It is a curious thing, alright. I am pleased to meet you, none the less, Mrs. Grower,” Bernard said.

“Excuse my manners. I am pleased to meet you also, Mr. Smallholder. Please, call me Ella.”

“Either Bernard or Bernie would be more to my liking also.”

“Please come in, everyone. I will fetch some lemonade.”

“Ooo. That sounds delightful. There are no lemons where I live,” Bernard said.

Just then, Edward came in from the field. Introductions were made, and the peculiar tale of how Bernard used to own the farm and now lived underground was told.

“Well, now that you mention it, I do recall my grandfather saying the farm was abandoned when they bought it. Could it be possible?” Edward said.

“Seems the only explanation. I know this land like the back of my hand. I am sure it is the farm I abandoned.”

“But that would make you... Very old,” Ella said.

“I can’t argue with that,” Bernard said.

“Perhaps living underground has extended your lifespan,” Edward wondered.

“Perhaps it has. It appears I made a good choice staying below ground.”

Bernard became quite a celebrity on Phiddle as he told his story over and over again. Then he

decided it was time to return home. He invited folks to come and visit anytime. Advising them to wear comfortable shoes for the climb.

How long Bernard lived at the bottom of that hole remains one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.

Finding Faraway

If you ever visit the island of Phiddle, you will likely see a chippen. Chippens are tiny animals with strong, sharp teeth who like to chip away at things. They chip away at their food. They chip away at their paw nails. They chip away at fallen branches, turning them into woodsy sculptures, flutes, or handy walking sticks for the humans.

Faraway was a young chippen, and she was still learning to chip properly. It was taking her longer than most chippens because she was easily distracted. She always seemed to be daydreaming.

One delightfully sunny day, Faraway decided to go for a walk to the pond to enjoy a swim. On the way, she noticed a butterfly. This particular butterfly was unlike any she had seen in her short life. It had white wings with little golden rings on them. And it flew in a series of loops.

Naturally, Faraway forgot all about the pond and began following the butterfly. She wondered why it flew in circles and where it was going.

As Faraway followed the butterfly, she struck up a conversation.

“Why do you fly in circles?” Faraway asked.

“I am a twirler. That is what we do,” the flying creature answered.

“You are not a butterfly?”

“Of course not, silly chippen. Butterflies flit. Twirlers twirl.”

“Oh. My name is Faraway.”

“I’m Wilbur. Pleased to meet you, Faraway.”

“Where are you going, Wilbur?”

“Home. I have been on an adventure and am quite tired.”

“What kind of adventure?”

“The usual kind. Flying about, looking for interesting things.”

“Did you find any?”

“Any what?”

“Interesting things.”

“Only a curious chippen, I’m afraid.”

Faraway giggled.

“Where do you live?” Faraway asked.

“In the meadow by Phiddle Mountain. It is where all twirlers live. They have the most delicious pollen there.”

“I’ve never eaten pollen.”

“I should hope not. You would destroy our beautiful flowers with your teeth.”

“I wouldn’t want to do that. I will stick to Phiddleberries and crunch corn.”

“What is crunch corn?”

“They are the nuggets that fall out of the great trees.”

“Oh. Twirlers call those acorns.”

“So does my mother, but I like to call them crunch corn.”

“I see.”

They continued to chat as Wilbur twirled his way home.

By the time they reach the meadow by Phiddle Mountain, it was well past lunchtime. Faraway’s mother, Snippet, was growing worried about Faraway. Faraway had never been gone this long. Snippet looked in all the usual places but didn’t find Faraway in any of them. So she walked over to one of the great trees and called out to Flutter, a large phiddlebird.

“Flutter! I need your help, please.”

Flutter flew down from his home in the tree.

“What is the problem?” Flutter asked.

“Faraway is missing. She left this morning and hasn’t returned for lunch.”

“Oh my. I shall take to the sky and find her. Don’t worry.”

“Thank you, Flutter.”

Flutter flew up into the sky and began scanning the surrounding area. As he passed other birds, Flutter recruited them to his mission. After a long search, a bird named Glide found Faraway in the meadow by Phiddle Mountain. He landed next to Faraway.

“Your mother is quite worried about you, little one,” Glide said.

“Oh, dear. I forgot about lunch. No wonder my tummy is rumbling. You wouldn’t happen to have any Phiddleberries, would you?” Faraway asked.

“I do not. But I am sure your mother will. Follow me, and I will lead you home.”

Glide flew up into the sky, and Faraway followed him back to her home. After feeding Faraway a late lunch, Snippet gathered a basket of Phiddleberries. Then she took them to the birds who had searched for Faraway. It was her way of saying “thank you” for finding her daughter.

The next day, Snippet went to see Rebecca Wellington and asked her to be her translator. Since Rebecca was only six-years-old, she could still talk

to animals. Rebecca and Snippet went to Professor Tinkerhoffer's workshop, and Rebecca told him the story of how Faraway wandered off. Snippet had Rebecca ask the Professor if there was anything he could do.

“Leave it to me,” the Professor said.

The following day, Professor Tinkerhoffer visited Snippet and gave her a twine necklace with a small metal cube attached. And a much larger cube made of wood.

“Have Faraway wear the necklace. If you can't find her, push the button on top of the wooden box. It will make a beeping sound in Faraway's necklace, reminding her to come home. The beeping will get louder as she gets closer to home, helping her find her way. Hopefully, as she ages, she will not need such reminders, but you never know.”

“This is marvelous. Thank you, Professor. Would you care for lunch?”

“I would be delighted to have some Phiddleberries, but I believe I will pass on the acorns.”

How Professor Tinkerhoffer was able to create such a mechanical homing device remains one of the many mysteries on the island of Phiddle.

Blown Out To Sea

Once there was an unusual bird on the Island of Phiddle who refused to fly. But thanks to a warble at the top of Phiddle Mountain, the bird found the courage to try and discovered that she loved flying. The bird's name was Stroller.

Now, before Stroller learned to fly under her own power, Professor Tinkerhoffer had built her a bird-sized hot-air balloon. This allowed her to fly a different way. Of course, once Stroller discovered her natural ability to fly, she no longer needed the hot-air balloon and promptly gave it away. To a chipmunk named Doughty.

As chipmunks aren't particularly good at flying — rather awful, in fact — Doughty was thrilled with the gift. And being a courageous and clever chipmunk, Doughty soon started a business flying other small Phiddle creatures to the top of Phiddle Mountain. Where they could enjoy the view and the excellent singing of the warbles.

Doughty charged a reasonable fee of two Phiddleberries per trip. His hot-air balloon business was quite successful. So much so that he had put on a few ounces. Phiddleberries are hard to resist.

One morning, Doughty was taking a bunny named Fleecy to the top of Phiddle Mountain. The trip was going as usual, with Doughty pointing out landmarks below. Suddenly, a strong wind blew in from over the top of Phiddle Mountain and carried Doughty's balloon far out to sea.

Doughty tried changing elevation, but the wind was too powerful. Eventually, the wind died down, but by then, Doughty and Fleecy could no longer see the Island of Phiddle.

“Oh, dear me,” Doughty said.

“Oh my, oh my,” Fleecy added. “Can we find our way back?”

“Have no fear. The wind blew us in a straight line. I simply need to reverse course, and we shall eventually return to our cherished home.”

Despite his brave words, Doughty was nervous on the inside. But he followed his plan and found a wind blowing the opposite direction, toward the Island of Phiddle. Unfortunately, they had been blown farther out to sea than Doughty had guessed.

After quite some time, they still could not see the island.

“I am afraid I have some terrible news. We have run out of wood for the burner. We will soon land in the sea.” Doughty said.

“Look!” Fleecy cried out.

Below them, three large shapes began to surface from under the water. They were whales. Doughty called out to the whales.

“Excuse me. We are in a spot of trouble. I wonder if you might be willing to help us? You see, we were blown out to sea by a strong wind. We are about to run out of fuel for the burner, which keeps our balloon in the air. Since we are both land animals, a lengthy stay in the sea could prove disastrous for us.”

“Well, that is a problem, alright. Why don’t you land your flying machine on my back, and I will give you a ride back to land. Where are you from?”

“The Island of Phiddle.”

“Ah. I know it well. It is not far. I would be happy to help you out.”

“You are so very kind. My name is Doughty, and my friend’s name is Fleecy.”

“Pleased to meet you both. My name is Mammoth. My friend’s names are Hugo and Blimpy.”

Doughty gently landed the balloon on Mammoth’s back. Mammoth shot a stream of water out of his blowhole. The water flew into the air and then landed on his back, giving Doughty and Fleecy a good soaking.

“I beg your pardon. I have never had a flying machine land on me, and it tickled,” Mammoth said.

“No problem at all. I planned to take a bath tomorrow anyway,” Doughty said.

“I am glad. The boys and I are just returning from a trip to a distant sea where large icebergs float on

the surface, and the most curious birds swim under the water.”

“That sounds amazing.”

“Oh, it was. But I have heard tales of amazing things on the Island of Phiddle as well.”

“It is true. There are countless wonders on Phiddle. Which is why we are desperate to get back. And so grateful for your rescue.”

“It is my pleasure. And what a tale you have given me. I am quite sure I am the first whale ever to have a chipmunk and a bunny in a flying machine land on his back.”

“That is most likely true.”

The morning progressed nicely, and they enjoyed many stories of each other’s adventures. Soon they were in sight of the Island of Phiddle. Doughty and Fleecy had already packed the ballon into the basket and moved it over Mammoth’s blowhole as he instructed.

“Are you ready?” Mammoth asked.

“We are,” Doughty replied.

“Then I wish you many more adventures.
Farewell, friends.”

“Farewell to you, my large friends. May you see
all of the seas and their many wonders.”

With that, Mammoth blew air out of his
blowhole, lifting the basket containing Doughty and
Fleecy, and hurling them across the water and onto
the beach of Phiddle. It was a bumpy ride ending
with quite a jolt, but both Doughty and Fleecy were
unharmed. The balloon was fine also, thanks to the
soft sand on the shoreline.

Doughty and Fleecy climbed out of the balloon
basket and waved to their new seafaring friends.
The three whales waved their tails in return and
then disappeared under the water.

How was it possible that the whales surfaced at
precisely the right moment and at exactly the right
place to rescue Doughty and Fleecy? That remains
one of the many mysteries on the Island Of Phiddle.

Farewell

I hope you enjoyed my tales from The Island Of Phiddle. Thank you for reading.

Good day.

Phineas Phiddlephaddle