

Spaghetti
& Giraffe
and the
Egg of Courage

For my Mum – SJ
For Caitlin – DH

With huge thanks to Barbara Else and Barbara Murison

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Spaghetti & Giraffe

and the
Egg of Courage



Sarah Johnson
Illustrations by Deborah Hinde





Chapter 1

IT WAS WINTER, and the buttery light that had filled the broad bowl of the Bonbon Valley since summer, was gone.

In her little house at the tip-top of Meringue Hill, Mina Cucina was in the kitchen. Her best and oldest friend, Gorgon, was coming to dinner and she was determined to cook.

“Not pasta this time,” she muttered, as she leafed through the pages of her mother’s old cookbook. “This time I want to make something

different, something altogether more special.” She flicked through a few more pages. “On no, not that. It’s too tricky.” Flick, flick. “I do wish Mum was here. She’d know what to cook.”

For a moment, Mina Cucina stopped flicking and gazed sadly at her mother’s large wooden spoon, hanging on the wall next to the dresser. Then she sighed and turned back to the book.

“What I need is something simple but sumptuous, with a dash of spice, and a splash of colour. Something that fills the mouth with an explosion of taste.” Flick, flick. “Perhaps a boiled egg? Could I boil an egg?” Flick, flick. “Oh dear, I wish I hadn’t mentioned explosions. I don’t want the egg to explode and splatter poor Gorgon. I want him to feel special, not sticky. The egg mustn’t, it simply mustn’t explode!”

Behind Mina Cucina, the under-cooker animals cowered. “Not eggs, please not eggs,” they whispered to one another.



“Eggs are better than pumpkin,” said a plump marshmallow pig. “Remember the time she tried to make soup? We had an orange pond under the cooker for a week.”

“I cleaned it up,” said a macaroni snail, rather proudly. “It was a very big pond.”

“You’re forgetting the scrambled egg fiasco,” said a monkey made mainly of fluff. “When the recipe said beat the eggs, Mina Cucina hit them with the rolling pin.”

“I got splattered with yolk,” said a small hedgehog.

“We all did,” chimed in his friends.

All the hedgehogs were made of prunes, with toothpicks for spikes. They had started life as a plate of hors d’oeuvres, and like all the animals

who lived underneath the cooker, had been born following one of Mina Cucina's culinary mishaps.

Huddled with the hedgehogs were a squat frog with bulging pea eyes, a toffee beetle, several fettuccine snakes, and a family of broad-bean tadpoles who had only recently arrived.

Mina Cucina's mother had been a great cook – the best in the Bonbon Valley and beyond. But Mina Cucina had not inherited her talents. Every dish she attempted turned at best into a mess, and at worst, a disaster. Cakes exploded, pots slopped, and platters dropped. But when a morsel of mangled food found its way under the cooker, a new animal would be born.

“Now let me see,” said Mina Cucina. “The recipe says, *Put eggs in saucepan with water*. But it doesn't say how many eggs. Perhaps I'd better fill the pot? I don't want Gorgon to be hungry.”

Mina Cucina arranged fifteen eggs in the saucepan and stood back to survey her

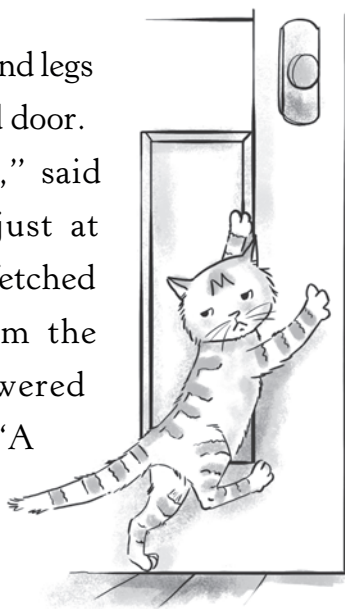
handiwork. “That looks good,” she said. “Perhaps I’ll get the hang of this cooking lark after all.”

Her cat, which had been sleeping in an armchair by the dresser, opened an alarmed eye. It stood up, stretched and headed for the kitchen door.

“I don’t think much of this recipe,” said Mina Cucina to the cat. “It doesn’t mention how much water to add, either. Do you think eggs can drown?”

The cat stood on its hind legs and clawed at the closed door.

“In a minute, puss,” said Mina Cucina. “I’m just at the tricky part.” She fetched her watering can from the windowsill and showered it over the eggs. “A sprinkle should do. There! Now the recipe



says, *Place on heat*. I always find it's best to cook things on full. That way, they won't be raw."

Mina Cucina turned the knob on the cooker and flames shot up the sides of the saucepan.

The cat clawed more urgently at the door.

Mina Cucina wiped her hands on her apron. "All done! It's really very simple once you know how."

The cat started leaping up the kitchen door, trying to reach the handle with its paws.

Mina Cucina picked it up. "Silly old puss. What's all the hurry to go outside?" The cat writhed in her arms. "Okay, okay. We'll see if Gorgon's coming. He said he'd be here by six. The eggs should be ready by then. In fact, by the time Gorgon arrives, the eggs should be just about perfect."



Chapter 2

GORGON WAS TRUDGING up Meringue Hill. The winding white path that led from Bonbon Village at the bottom of the hill to Mina Cucina's house at the top, was buried in snow. On either side, trees spread dull bare branches against an equally dull sky. Icicles dripped and plinked in passing gusts of frosty wind. Small birds huddled, and large ones circled, their shadows sliding like dark sighs over the cold white world below.

Gorgon didn't notice. He was on his way to

visit his favourite person, and the space around him was warmed by happiness, like a bubble of sunshine accompanying him up the hill.

“Perhaps tonight,” said Gorgon, as he stepped over a frozen puddle. “Perhaps tonight I’ll be brave enough to ask.”

A small blue bird twittered around Gorgon’s head. He stopped to watch it.

“Surely tonight, I’ll finally do it,” he said to the bird. “I’ve been wanting to for such a long time, and maybe, just maybe she’ll say yes.” The bird circled and dipped, tracing patterns against the leaden sky. “And then,” continued Gorgon. “Well, then I’ll be the happiest man in the entire Bonbon Valley. No! The entire world.”

Now that Gorgon was standing still, faint noises could be heard coming from inside the backpack he carried. Muffled sounds of shuffling and scraping, as if something small was trying to burrow its way to the top.

The bluebird, hungry and excited by

the possibility of insects, swooped down to investigate. Gorgon, however, was too preoccupied with thoughts of Mina Cucina to notice.

“She must say *yes*,” he said to the swooping bird. “But if she doesn’t, oh dear, I don’t know what I’ll do.”

He hitched the backpack more firmly onto his shoulders and set off once more up the hill.

On his back, the small burrowing something had reached the top of the bag. It bumped and pushed beneath the backpack’s buckled flap, as it hunted for a way to get out.

There was more scuffling, and a little snout emerged on one side of the flap. After a moment, a second snout appeared on the other side. The snouts sniffed the air, as if they could tell by smell exactly where they were. Then, with another push, two heads emerged – pretty heads with large lash-fringed eyes and short bobbly horns.

The heads belonged to giraffes, but not the type you might expect to find in a zoo, or on the plains of Africa. These were spaghetti giraffes, with golden coats, glossy with olive oil, and elegant spaghetti-length necks. One giraffe was slightly larger than the other, while the smaller of the two was covered in fine blue speckles.



Like the other under-cooker animals, the giraffes had been made by Mina Cucina. But unlike the others, they had left her kitchen and

ventured out to see the world. Now, they were returning home.

Had Gorgon looked around, he would have been stunned to see two giraffes peering expectantly over his shoulder. But Gorgon didn't look. He had reached Mina Cucina's house, and rested only long enough to catch his breath, before climbing the stairs that led to her door.

Behind him, the bluebird swooped and trilled goodbye. The two giraffes, happy to have finally arrived, withdrew their heads and disappeared once more into the backpack.

Gorgon stood squarely before Mina Cucina's front door and drew a deep breath. "I must ask her," he said. "I must do it. I must ask what I came to ask and then I must hope for the best."