

Thea and the Camel

Write a story about a main character who's surprise birthday party goes very wrong.

Thea Whiteman was afraid. Her birthday was *tomorrow*, and her mom had shown no sign of a birthday party! Had she forgotten? *No*, Thea told herself. *She wouldn't have*. But had they? *Could I just ask her?* She thought. *Nah, that wouldn't work. If she was going to do something, she would have said so by now*. Unless...

Brrrrrrring! Brrrrrrring! Thea absentmindedly slapped her alarm clock. She got up, brushed her teeth, dressed, and brushed her hair, all the while trying not to think about how it was her eleventh birthday and no one had given her so much as a second glance. Then she started downstairs, and noticed the smell of waffles, her favorite breakfast. Thea liked waffles even more than crepes, which was saying something. *Hmmm...* Thea thought. *Maybe things are going to turn out okay after all*.

"Thea, breakfast!" Thea's mom called. "Coming!" She called back. Thea raced down the stairs. But her mood was ruined by the large, wooden box in the dining room. *With air holes*. It looked big enough to fit a camel! Thea didn't like camels. "Happy birthday! We made your favorite, chocolate cake, for dessert tonight!" Thea frowned. Chocolate cake wasn't her favorite; lemon cake was. Also, her mom was a terrible cook. Except for when she made waffles. Waffles couldn't be done wrong, in Thea's opinion. Anyway, there were waffles this morning. That was all that mattered. But when Thea sat down, her mom made her get up again. She gestured at the camel-sized wooden box. "Go on, open it!" She said excitedly. With a growing feeling of dread, Thea made her way toward the box. She unlatched the lid, and out came... a camel.

"Her name is Carrot!" Thea's mom beamed. "She is ten, almost as old as you are!" Thea stared at her mother. She couldn't believe her ears! Then she sighed. It didn't seem like there was a way to worm out of this one.

After breakfast, Thea curled up beside her cat, Moonstone. Moonstone always made her feel better. But not now. This was too big a mess. Thea petted Moonstone anyway. The cat purred, which made Thea feel slightly better. *At least someone's happy*, Thea thought. But then, Moonstone was always happy when she was being petted, in a high place, or hiding in the shadows.

The phone rang. Thea made no move to answer it. Unfortunately, her mom did. When she picked it up, she scowled. Then she turned on Thea. “What was that!?!” She demanded angrily. Thea knew right away that it had been her best friend Robin. Every year for as long as Thea remembered, it had been their tradition for Robin to call Thea and ask what terrible gifts she had gotten that year. Now Thea’s mom had answered the phone, and Thea would have to think of a reply, and quick.

“Um... it’s a game we play. On our birthdays.” There. That was true enough. “I see.” Thea’s mom murmured. Thea could tell she didn’t buy it, but her mom didn’t press. Thea was grateful, even though it was probably only because it was her birthday. But it didn’t matter. Thea’s birthday could officially not get any worse.

When Thea woke the next morning, for a brief, lovely moment she couldn’t remember the previous day’s events. Then she did. But Thea wouldn’t give up that easily. So she thought. *Mom gave me a camel I don’t want... What can I do about that?* Thea thought. *Hang on... Robin might know. She knows everything that goes on around here. And since she volunteers at the zoo...*

“Does the zoo need a camel?” Thea asked Robin. She had crossed the street to her best friend’s house, bringing Moonstone like she always did, (not that Moonstone liked it) and was sitting on Robin’s light blue carpet. Robin’s room was large with lavender walls, with a small bathroom in one corner, a bed and a nightstand in another, a closet covering one wall, a desk next to the bathroom, a few scattered bean bag chairs in the center, and bookshelves on the remaining walls. Robin *loved* books, like Thea. The only difference was that Thea liked fantasy and Robin liked nonfiction.

“Yeah, the zoo could use a camel. Why?” Thea replayed their conversation in her head. “Well you asked what I got for my birthday...” Thea had begun. “*No way.*” Robin breathed. Then she started speaking in a rapid-fire manner. “I can’t believe you got a camel for your birthday. Of course I’ll do everything I can to help, but I’m not sure there’s much I can do... I mean, I can’t exactly walk up to the zoo manager and say, ‘my best friend got a camel for her birthday, should we arrange a date to pick it up?’ But still... should we talk to your mom”- Robin was cut off by Thea’s automatic “No.” Thea wished her mom hadn’t gotten her into this mess, but she knew one thing: Once Mom decided something, there was no turning back. They’d have to think of another way.

Despite Robin's warning, Thea called the zoo. "Hello?" She asked. "This is Thea Whiteman - I'm a friend of Robin Kelly; she volunteers at the zoo a lot - I just turned eleven and I got a camel for my birthday." Thea held her breath. "All right Thea, I'll send someone in on Saturday. But there better be a real camel." Thea breathed a sigh of relief, even though she could tell the girl didn't believe her. But what was Mom going to say?

When Saturday came around, Thea had started to regret calling. What if the zoo decided they didn't want Carrot? But Thea's biggest worry was what Mom would say. She called Robin, wanting a friend to be there when the zookeepers arrived; although Robin was already standing on the porch! When the truck pulled up, Thea could see two people. The truck was leaf green, with the zoo logo on the sides. There were more words on the back, too, that Thea couldn't make out. When the door opened the zookeepers (Thea assumed they were zookeepers) stepped out, and Thea got a good look at them. The woman who was driving had straight brown hair and warm amber eyes. Her name tag read ARIANA. The other girl couldn't have been more different. She looked about Thea's age, maybe a year or two older, with flaming red hair and bright green eyes. Her name tag said she was named Kiki, and her voice was like frothing whitewater when she spoke. "I hear you called for the *camel*?" Thea recognized her voice as the girl who answered the phone the day she had called. Kiki still didn't sound convinced that there really was a camel. "Yeah," Thea responded uncertainly, but Robin cut in. "Of course she did! Thea, this is Kiki. She's a friend of mine." She directed the last part to Thea. "Right....I figured that out already." Thea's voice was still wobbly, and she hated herself for it. "I'll go get Carrot."

By the time Thea got Carrot outside, her mom had heard the ruckus, and she came outside. "Oh, I can't believe I missed it!" She exclaimed. Bewildered, Thea followed. Ariana smiled. Her voice was like a shimmering waterfall. "We are ready when you are." She stepped into the front seat of the truck, pressed a few buttons, and the back door of the vehicle opened. Thea looked at the zookeepers uncertainty. "Bring the camel inside." Ariana told Thea. "What is her name again?" It was the driver's turn to look uncertain. "Carrot." Kiki answered immediately. She grinned at Thea. "Sorry." Thea smiled back. "It's okay." She brought Carrot inside the truck. There were a few bright light bulbs on the ceiling, giving the room a good amount of light. Kiki and Robin stood at the door. "Oh!" Robin said suddenly, making Thea jump. "I almost forgot to give you your birthday present. She pulled a small box out of her bag. When Thea unwrapped it, the white tissue paper revealed a fox pendant.

As the truck drove away, Thea decided she wanted to volunteer at the zoo as well. Kiki had stayed for a while, telling Thea her full name was Kiki Sophia Black, and that she was also eleven. As it turned out, when Kiki heard it was Thea's birthday, she had decided to bring a cake. She told Thea it

was by chance (though Thea thought robin might have something to do with it) that she brought a lemon cake. Thea's mom apologized, saying she forgot that lemon was Thea's favorite kind of cake. Thea started work the next week on Tuesday and Thursday from 3:30 - 5:15, and she would be taking care of the foxes and hummingbirds, her two favorite animals.

The End