

Sparky's First Socks

Legend has it that there's an invisible being that lives within our dryers called the sock monster. It secretly steals our socks whenever we do the laundry, leaving our bare feet cold and neglected. The annoying part is that it doesn't steal our socks in pairs but one by one, breaking up each pair and leaving the other sock miserable and worthless. But did you know? The sock monster wasn't always the sock monster.

Before its days of swiping people's socks, it was part of a top notch, underground gang called the Static Sticklers. This gang was actually part of a microscopic species that lived off of clothing fibers. A select few came to form this gang known as the Static Sticklers out of a thirst for revenge on humans who in the past had done nothing but try to wipe out their species. The Static Sticklers didn't just target socks, but all or any clothes that humans wore. The gang was organized into five sections. Sparky, today known as our neighborly sock monster, used to be a part of the fifth section, the labor section where he was forced to work to his limit as a lowly peasant from the West side of the underground tunnels connecting all dryers.

Sparky only agreed to join the gang because at least with this job, he earned enough food to feed his family. He hated his job and everything his boss made him go through multiple times a day to earn his share of clothing fibers. While the fourth section of the gang had the task of collecting as many clothing fibers as they could in the short time between when the dryer stops and when the human comes to pick up their laundry, his section had the gruesome task of remaining motionless and allowing the evil burst of air from the dryer to slam them around and spread their fuzzy gray hair all over the clothes inside. He went home bruised and broken everyday with a splitting headache, but at least his family was taken care of. That's all that mattered, for he had no other option. But one day, his life changed for the better.

It was a busy Saturday afternoon. The dryer was on the job all day. Apparently, people had no plans on this Saturday. They stayed home and tackled the growing pile of dirty clothes

sitting in the middle of their closets. It took people a good seven minutes to load their wet clothes into the dryer and these made up the few measly moments Sparky had to rest within the day.

Sparky had already been through five cycles and his body ached more and more after each cycle. It was only 3 pm so far and since this was an apartment building, all tenants were allowed to use the dryer from 9 am to 9 pm. He had six more hours of hell to suffer alone.

Sparky sat on the top-most ledge inside the dryer, swinging his legs back and forth as he waited for the next load of clothes. Since his body was partly composed of static electricity, he could cling onto the ledge forever if he chose and didn't have to worry about slipping off. Every member of his section had the special ability to grow their hair out within a matter of minutes when exposed to heat. To the human eye, they looked no different than tiny, little balls of fuzz but they were in fact just as human. They had humanlike arms, legs, heads, and everything. The only distinctive qualities between them were that their body shapes were too tiny for humans to distinguish from their hair without a super powerful microscope, unless they chose to morph into their actual size in front of them. It was their hair that was made up of little, gray, fuzzy fibers. They also had the power to regenerate their hair, so when their hair exploded, they were bald for a few minutes and then, their hair grew back as if nothing had happened.

As Sparky was waiting, piles and piles of wet, heavy clothes kept falling into the dryer. There were jeans, t-shirts, sweaters, and socks pouring in. For some reason, there was even a small white teddy bear thrown inside. Finally, something different, Sparky thought. After a few minutes, the dryer was loaded with clothes three fourths of the way up and the dryer door slammed shut. At this time, Sparky leaped off the ledge onto the hill of clothes underneath. He landed with a soft thud and then, bounced around a little on the soft spot to make sure it was sturdy enough to hold his weight, even though he'd last on that spot for only a few seconds. Then he sat down cross-legged on top of the pile as if he was getting ready to meditate. He sat there

patiently, his blue eyes shut tight and prayers being rapidly recited in his head, until he heard a loud rumbling sound building up from deep within the dryer.

When the rumbling sound reached full intensity, a blast of deathly heat flew in, also known as Sparky's commander in charge, Heat Wave. What once was a mountain of clothes standing in solitude became a storm of some sort. The pile had broken up into individual fragments and clothes were being tossed and turned around. Sparky too was tossed into the chaos, but his sole job was to remain still. He wasn't to make any effort to take action, because Heat Wave was in full control of the operation. Heat Wave knocked him into shirts and stomped on him by lifting up the long leg of a pair of wet jeans and dropping it on him. Sparky's hair was flattened into a thin sheet of fuzzy, little balls sticking to the side of the dryer. Some of them were pulled back onto his head but a few managed to stay behind. His head meanwhile swayed backwards, feeling heavier as his hair expanded.

After being pounded into some more clothes a couple of times, Sparky lost consciousness and landed with a splat onto a thick wool sweater at the bottom of the dryer that was too heavy for Heat Wave to push around. The wool underneath him became hotter. It felt like he was lying, submerged halfway in a frying pan instead of a wool sweater. His head throbbed with tremendous pain as the little balls of fuzz that made up his hair continued to multiply. This pain had its own heartbeat. The hotter it got, the louder it grew. The paralyzing pain shot little sparks of static electricity to the roots of his hair and Sparky snapped out of his temporary coma hearing its crackle. His hair had expanded to fill an eighth of the space inside the dryer with his body remaining as tiny as ever.

It had already been thirty-five minutes. He lay there trapped within the wool fibers until the last few minutes of the cycle when it was time for his number one job. When it was about 3:40 pm, he got up carefully, trying to balance the weight of his hair and made his way to the middle of the chaos. Since his hair weighed him down, Heat Wave wasn't able to cause him any

more damage. Sparky stood amidst clothes flying in every direction. He caught blurred glimpses of green, red, black, purple, brown, white, and more colors. He felt the textures of different clothes like nylon, cotton, polyester, and wool as they brushed past him.

For the most part, he smelled a fresh lavender scent radiating from the clothes but at one point, the small white teddy bear charged into him and once again, knocked him down. As the teddy bear pushed past him, he understood why it had been put in the wash in the first place. Although its fur appeared clean from the outside, there were traces of the smell of wet vomit coming from it. Luckily, Sparky had become used to the variety of stench that came from even washed clothes over the past decade in this stainless, steel cylinder he called his second home.

Sparky slowly stood up again in the very center of the dryer. His hair was almost ready. It crackled with such frequency and after about a minute or so, the second wave of static electricity didn't just run through his hair but pushed it out of its roots. His hair exploded into a hailstorm of little white fuzzies. Some of them slowly floated down as if on a parachute and were drawn to soft cotton patches. Others shot down full force like meteors. They clinged to the soft cotton and snuggled up into their warmth. Now, a million little fuzzies covered the clean, dry clothes and permanently chained themselves there.

Sparky was pushed forward into the front area of the dryer. He hadn't become unconscious this time but he laid next to the barf bear, paralyzed from the shock of the explosion. This had never happened before. He may have been partially numb for a few seconds after but had never lost complete feeling in his body until today. He wondered if this was how Einstein had felt after he made some mind-boggling discovery. What was once a cute white teddy bear stared down at him viciously, mocking his helplessness. He looked at the dark gray arch of the dryer above him and started to panic. In a few moments, the humans would be coming to pick up their clothes.

What would they do if they found him? It's not like humans had never seen people from his species before but typically those humans were children. Adults didn't have any sense of imagination, but after that close encounter with the crazy scientist, they couldn't take any chances. It was quite a surprise that a scientist, a person whose entire career is built on rationality was able to spot them. But as for other adults, if they didn't believe in them, they couldn't see them either. To children, they looked like blinding little specs of dust. It was amusing how much an adult freaked out upon discovering them compared to little children.

The loud rumbling of the dryer had ceased and Heat Wave was gone, for he too was controlled by a higher power, Electrike, the electricity that ran through the dryer's circuits. The fourth levelers came and went about their business collecting as many clothing fibers as they could in the few moments they had. Nobody in the gang appreciated the work fifth levelers did. They ignored them and treated them like dirt, but in essence, the leaders of the gang took care of them and their families. No one, however, stepped forward to help Sparky. Suddenly, there was a clickety-clacking sound coming from outside the dryer. All the fourth levelers dispersed and ducked into the connecting tunnel inside the dryer, leaving him behind.

Sparky became more nervous as the sound got louder and louder. The dryer door opened with a nerve-wracking creak and for a moment, all was still. Then, a hand came in and started to pull the clothes out of the dryer. "Ugghhh... Not again," a feminine voice said. "Why does this always happen? I always clean the filter out before loading the clothes into the dryer. It's like I'm cursed to spend a half hour cleaning this crap off my clothes before going to work every morning." "Mommy? How much longer?" another light, airy voice echoed through the hallway. "Just wait until it beeps, honey. I'll be there in a minute."

The hand grabbed and pulled the fuzz-littered clothes out of the dryer faster. Sparky still couldn't move and was shoved onto the rotten teddy bear when the hand tugged on a pair of jeans hopelessly tangled with other some clothes. Within moments, the hand filled a laundry

basket up to the rim with them. Sparky lay on the teddy bear, which was left until the end. The hand picked up the teddy bear and placed it gently on top of the pile of clothes in the navy blue basket. Sparky was stuck to the teddy's bear plush stomach. The hand slammed the dryer door shut and Sparky saw that the hand belonged to a pretty woman, probably in her thirties. She was wearing a rosy pink bathrobe that reached all the way down to the ground, covering her pink and white Hello Kitty slippers. She lifted the basket up and carried it through the short hallway into her first floor apartment.

She walked into a bright colored room with a sky blue ceiling, two opposing pink walls, and two opposing sea green walls. Inside the room stood a small twin sized bed with a crown shaped headboard. The bed was layered with light purple sheets decorated with Disney fairies like Tinkerbell and Silvermist. Pillows in the shapes of flowers and castles covered most of the headboard. A little girl, six years old at the least was leaning against the pillows. "Did it beep yet?" asked the woman. "Yes, it did. Here you go. What does it say?" the little girl said. The woman read something on the thin white stick and sighed with concern. "It says 103 degrees, Tammy. If this keeps up, I'm afraid you'll have to go see Dr. Dunzbucket." "No, I don't want to go see him. Every time I do, he makes me sicker. He's like a jinx, Mommy." "All right, I'll check again in a few hours and if your temperature hasn't gone down by then, no more buts." The little girl slouched back against the pillows in disappointment.

The woman left the room abruptly. She came back into the room in a pair of beige, corduroy pants and a dark purple top. "All right, I'm gonna run down to the pharmacy real quick. I'll be back in ten minutes. Ok?" "Ok, Mommy. I'll be fine." The woman walked out again and Tammy heard the front door open and close. Tammy got up from her bed and walked over to the laundry basket her mom had left behind. She picked up Snow Cone from the basket and went back to sit on her bed, her feet dangling off the edge and swinging back and forth. She took a long sigh. She really didn't want to go to that weirdo doctor, who always stuck that pointy metal

object into her ear and made her take shots for everything. And he didn't even give her a lollipop at the end of her appointments like her friend, Cassie got.

While she was thinking, she looked down at Snow Cone, now on her lap and felt so sorry that she threw up on her a while back. She started stroking Snow Cone's fur and felt miserable. Her head ached intensely on top of it. Suddenly, she found something small and shiny tangled into Snow Cone's fur. At first, she thought it was the glitter from her art project, but then the sparkle started moving around.

Sparky had finally regained feeling throughout his body, the temperature in this room cooling him down a bit and his gray hair started growing back before Tammy's astonished eyes. However, she didn't drop Snow Cone to the ground out of fear. She was curious about what this thing was. Was it a fairy? Were fairies this tiny?, she thought. In the Tinkerbell movie she saw, they were supposedly at least three inches tall. This was a really tiny speck. Sparky was sick and tired of being played around with and he decided to confront the little human girl about his situation. She looked harmless enough. Who would believe her story anyway? On the plus side, she seemed quite friendly and not at all like the mad scientist his people had encountered before. Sparky started to grow bigger and bigger and Tammy began to see small arms and legs appearing out of the air. When he grew to his full height, he was almost at eye level with her.

There was about ten inches of space between Tammy and him. Tammy looked at him with her big, brown eyes and stood there bewildered for a few moments, simply examining him. Then, she said, "What are you? Where did you come from?" "My name is Sparky. I'm a Stickler. I live inside the tunnels behind your dryer." "There's a tunnel inside our dryer?!" "No, not inside. Behind it. I work inside your dryer and litter your clothes with little fuzzies." "Oh, those things that Mommy hates? But why? That's not very nice you know." "Yeah, well, humans have done nothing but try to destroy us Sticklers."

“Wait, what’s a Stickler?” “It’s just what my people are called. You have your bears, monkeys, and snakes, right? Well, think of us as one of them, only we’re really similar to humans.” “So you’re a tiny human?” “Not exactly. Let’s just say that I’m a creature with some human characteristics but am not human.” “Well, why do you mess up Mommy’s clothes? She’s really nice once you get to know her.” “Sticklers live off of clothing fibers and humans aren’t willing to share them with us, so we’re forced to take them.” “Oh, you mean the thin cotton stuff that comes out of my socks?” “Exactly!” “Ok, well, if that’s what you need, here, take my socks with you.” Tammy took her thick purple socks off and held them out to Sparky. Her eyes gave a warm glow.

Sparky was taken back by the little girl’s kind gesture. Sparky took the socks from her and looked down at them, all worries about feeding his family for the next few months fading away. All he had ever heard about humans were bad things. Things like they didn’t like to live in peace with other animals, that they were destructive and were set upon eliminating every other species. Was everything he was taught wrong? Were they really friendly creatures? Maybe he wouldn’t have to be a part of the Static Sticklers anymore. He could live off of people’s socks. Every once in a while, he could take a sock. Those humans could afford another pair. But what about the evil scientist? Surely, that’s proof enough that humans were in fact evil. Maybe it’s only the children of the human species we can trust, Sparky thought. Sparky felt sorry for misjudging the little girl. She hadn’t even thought twice before handing him her socks. Maybe some humans were good hearted, he thought.

Even though he stood ten inches away from her, he could feel the heat radiating off her forehead and arms. Her head must be throbbing with pain and yet she can stand before me with such happiness. And Sparky knew that pain all too well. He decided to use his abilities to help her out. After all, it was the least he could do to repay her kind gesture. “And I also have some

magic powers,” he said. “Ooh, really? Like what? Show me. What magic can you do?” Tammy asked. Her beautiful brown eyes twinkled with joy.

“All right, I’ll show you some magic. Close your eyes and count slowly to five.” The little girl instantly shut her eyes and began to count. “One...Two....Three...” Meanwhile, Sparky waved his right hand over her forehead in a three-part pattern: left, right, left. He absorbed the excess heat that was radiating from her body. Tammy finished counting to five and when she opened her eyes, Sparky was gone. She looked under her bed and in her closet but she couldn’t find him anywhere. He just vanished as if he had never been there. Suddenly, she realized that her head had stopped aching and her throat didn’t feel so sore anymore. She felt so much better. Now she won’t have to go visit Dr. Dunzbucket. Magic indeed, Tammy thought.

When her mom came home from the pharmacy, she decided to check her temperature again. Although what difference could ten minutes have made?, she thought. Seeing the number again would only reassure her that her daughter had a rising high fever and she couldn’t do anything about it. She waited until the thermometer beeped again and took it out from Tammy’s mouth. She read the little rectangle and sat on Tammy’s bed in disbelief.

“That’s impossible! Your temperature dropped back to normal within such a short time. How is that possible?” her mom said. “It was magic, Mommy,” Tammy said. Her mother gave her a slight chuckle, with a “Yeah, right” look attached to her face. Tammy simply smiled back at her, knowing that she couldn’t possibly understand. It would remain her little secret.