

Flower Mart Adventure

Marian Riley loved going to the flower mart that was held every May in her hometown of Baltimore, Maryland. There was so much to see and do, she would spend hours and hours there. Best of all, she lived close enough to ride her bike and take along her dog, Tootsie. Marian and Tootsie were inseparable. Fortunately, Tootsie was small enough to fit in the basket of Marian's bike.

Marian frequently rode her bike to the library, to the bookstore, and to the Inner Harbor. She enjoyed the hustle and bustle of ships sailing in, people walking by, and vendors selling their wares. In good weather, Marian would ride her bike to the grocery. Tootsie would happily wait in the store's office for her to finish shopping. Sol, the owner, loved Tootsie and gave her treats. Tootsie loved him, too.

But today Marian and Tootsie were headed to the flower mart. This was a special occasion. For the first time, Marian had entered a bouquet she made into the contest for Most Original Arrangement. She didn't think she'd win, but she'd had so much fun making it that it didn't matter.

Marian and Tootsie were greeted by a young woman with a welcome sign and a smile. That was a big part of why Marian loved the flower mart—everyone was so friendly. It was a good opportunity to greet old friends and make new ones. She stood for a moment holding Tootsie, trying to decide where to go first. Tootsie, of course, voted for the food stand. Since it was lunchtime, Marian agreed. After feasting on corn dogs and funnel cake, they were ready to see the sights.

There were flowers everywhere with so many colors and sweet smells. Marian took a deep breath and smiled. She stopped to listen as one of her favorite songs, “What a Wonderful World,” was playing. She and Tootsie stopped at all the flower booths. Marian made several purchases for her garden.

And, of course, one cannot go to the Baltimore Flower Mart without having a lemon peppermint stick. This treat is a hollow peppermint stick that is stuck into a lemon. When you suck on the peppermint stick, you taste both the sweet and sour flavors together—delicious!

After several hours, Marian was happily exhausted. She and Tootsie took a moment for a refreshing cup of tea. And then, at last, it was time for the contest.

Marian knew her arrangement was beautiful, but she wasn't sure it was unusual enough. She was right. But she did win third place, and that made her happy. The big surprise was the winner: Sol, the grocer, won first place for his creation of salami and cheese buns shaped like roses. Everyone crowded close to get a good look at his masterpiece. Marian was so busy looking she didn't notice Tootsie was in reach of one of the buns. Very delicately (some might say sneakily), Tootsie grabbed one of the buns from the platter and swallowed it whole.

There was a gasp from the crowd, and Marian quickly grabbed Tootsie before she could do any more damage. Everyone looked at Sol. Sol looked at Tootsie. And Tootsie wagged her tail. Everyone held their breath, and then Sol started laughing—a big hearty laugh from deep in his belly. He

shook his finger at Tootsie and said, “My little friend, the next time you come to visit me in my office, don’t expect your usual treats.” Tootsie looked at Sol and whined.

“That’s right,” said Sol, “from now on your treat will be one of these,” and he pointed to the platter. Then, showman that he was, he turned to the crowd and said, “Come one, come all to my grocery store and stock up on my famous Tootsie-tested and approved, award-winning ‘Sol’s Bloomin’ Buns.’”

And with that, Marian and Tootsie got on their bike and rode home happy, but tired and ready for a nap.

The End