Mr. Tootles, of "Mr. Tootles and Those Oodles of Noodles," by New Iberia author Maryceleste Clement, has embarked on a new adventure in "Mr. Tootles and the Polka-Dot Lollypops," to be released in May.

Kudos for Tootles
Children's book author planning for second book in series

Maryceleste Clement has big plans for Mr. Tootles. The English gentleman who made his 2002 debut in "Mr. Tootles and Those Oodles of Noodles," will be featured in a series of at least 10 books. The second in the series, "Mr. Tootles and the Polka-Dot Lollypops," is scheduled for release in May. And not a moment too soon for Mr. Tootles' fans, according to Clement.

"Everyone who has the first book has told us, 'We're waiting for the second book.' We got a call from Boston, saying, 'Please hurry with the second book.' That tells me people really like the first book."

Mr. Tootles' world was mapped out from the outset, Clement said. "I had very specific ideas," she said. "I knew exactly what I wanted to do with the series. I planned the series from the beginning."

Subsequent adventures of Mr. Tootles are already in the works. "The next three are already laid out — at least in my head," said the New Iberia resident.

When Clement, who spends her days working in the family's oilfield businesses, first created Mr. Tootles, she field-tested his story on her family, first. When they liked it, she ventured a little farther out.

"I went to Lorraine (Kingston) at Books Along the Teche," she said.

When Kingston gave her thumbs-up on the story, Clement decided it was time to publish. Rather than submit the story to publishing houses, she decided to go the self-publishing route. She works with a designer in Los Angeles, who brings the words and art work together, then sends the final product to a publisher in Singapore. Baker and Taylor, a national book distributor, handles distribution.

"I was afraid to give up artistic rights," she said. "Once you find a publisher, they pretty much do their own thing — they have their own illustrator."

Clement preferred to work with an illustrator she knew. "I got in touch with Paul (Schexnayder) and worked very closely with him and we got the book where we wanted it."

Clement was already acquainted with the New Iberia artist. He had taught art to her children in the past. It would be Schexnayder's second foray into the world of illustrating children's books.

"The real fun and challenge was to create the character of Mr. Tootles," Schexnayder said. "She described him as tall, with a thin face, glasses. We went back and forth — maybe the nose is too long, the face is too pointy."

The trial-and-error period went on for days, Schexnayder said, until Mr. Tootles evolved to Clement's satisfaction. The results surprised everyone, even Schexnayder and Clement.

"I pretty much knew what he looked like," Clement said. "But, I had no idea he would look so much like Paul. That was a total accident."

Accident or no, it has worked to the pair's advantage when they give presentations to promote the book.

"We do school visits," Schexnayder said, "and I dress up like Mr. Tootles."

Want to buy?
"Mr. Tootles and Those Oodles of Noodles" is available locally at Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Books Along the Teche in New Iberia and the Albertson's in Broussard. The same stores will carry "Mr. Tootles and the Polka-Dot Lollypops" when it is released in May.