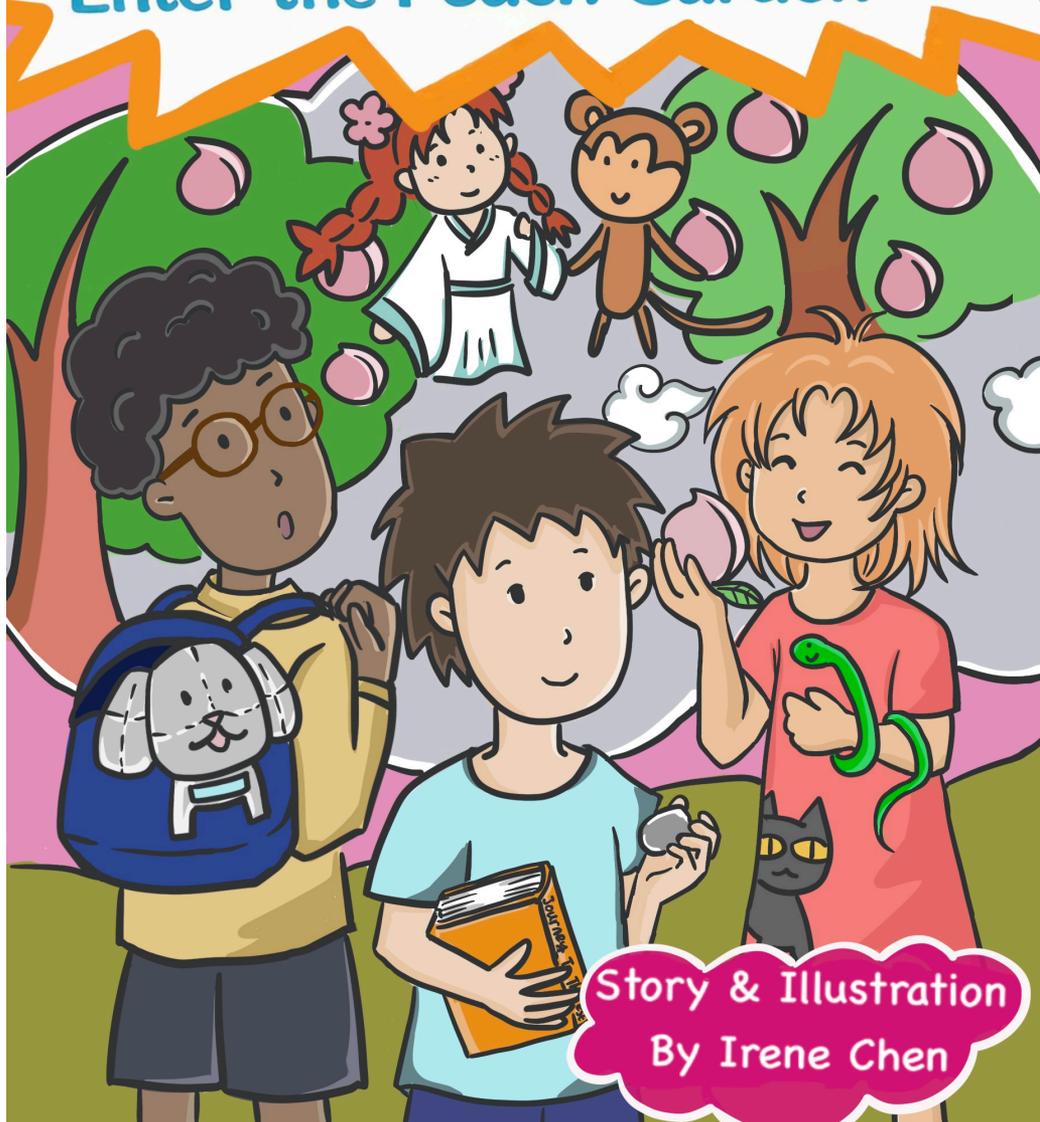


# BOOK SPIRITS 3

## Enter the Peach Garden



Story & Illustration  
By Irene Chen

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## CHAPTER 1 IMAGINARY FRIEND

The watch pointed to five-thirty. It was almost dinnertime.

Eddy carried his backpack toward the cafeteria. Suddenly, an open door caught his eye.

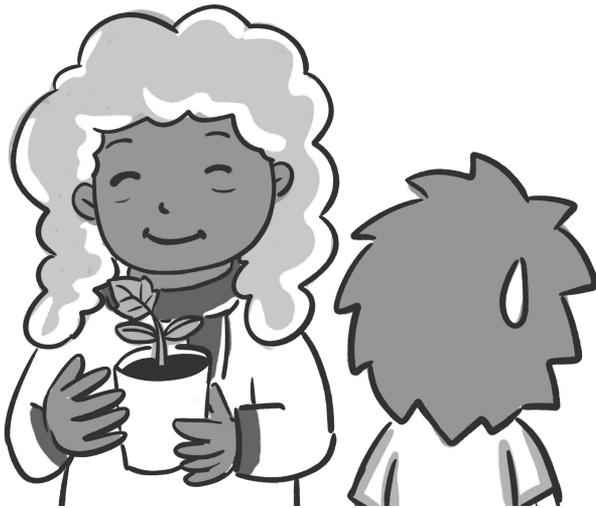
It was the science classroom on the first floor. Ms. Denise, the science teacher, stood at a long table covered with pots and soil. She was transplanting tiny seedlings into small paper cups.



Behind her, Eddy saw a boy with dark skin. He looked busy working on something.

“Hi, Ms. Denise!” Eddy called as he ran to the doorway.

Ms. Denise gently placed a seedling with bright green leaves into a paper cup. She covered its thin roots with soil, then looked up and smiled.



“Hi, Eddy!” she said as she held up the little pot. “Do you remember what kind of plant this is?”

“Peppers... no, wait. Is it a tomato?” Eddy guessed.

He wasn't very good at telling seedlings apart. But he was certain that, once the plant grew fruit, he would know for sure!

“Come on,” said a boy behind Ms. Denise, “It has a short, thick stem, one-inch cotyledons, and fuzzy true leaves. It has to be a pumpkin.”

It was Leo's voice—steady and serious, as if he were reading from a science textbook.



“You're right!” Ms. Denise said brightly. “I'm moving these new pumpkin sprouts into

containers. In our next science class, we'll plant them in the school garden."

Then she grinned at Eddy. "Want to help me? Or go see what Leo's up to——"

She glanced toward Leo and winked.

"But I should warn you," she added with a low voice, like telling a secret, "Leo has an imaginary friend. If you say you can't see it, he might not like that."

Before she could finish, something shiny hopped off the table.

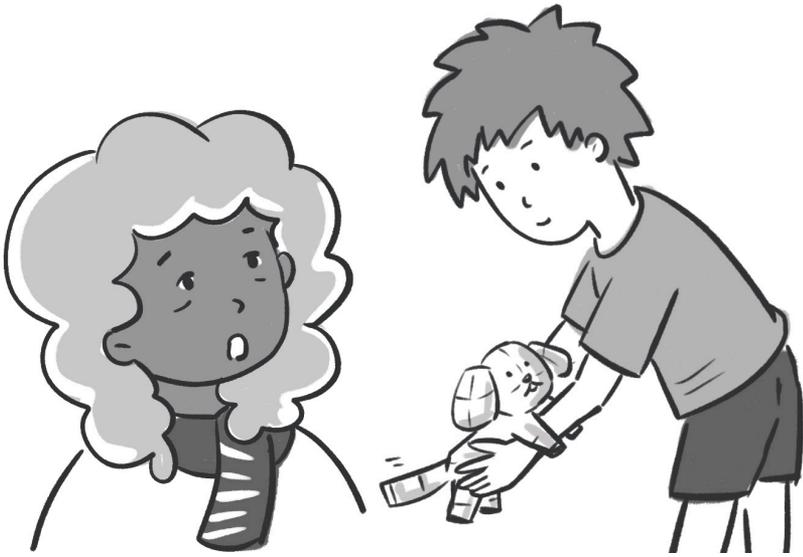
"Woof!"

A small metal dog landed on the floor. Its whole body gleamed like polished stainless steel.

It was Newton—Leo's book spirit!

But Ms. Denise didn't look at it at all. Her eyes went straight past the little robot dog, as if it wasn't there.

Eddy bent down and picked up Newton, who was wagging its short tail happily.



Ms. Denise gasped.

“Wow, Eddy! You’re quite an actor. It really looks like you’re holding something!”

“Uh...” Eddy tried to explain, then decided not to. He walked to Leo’s desk with Newton in his arms.

Leo stared at him, eyes wide. He held a screwdriver in one hand and a bunch of wires in the other.

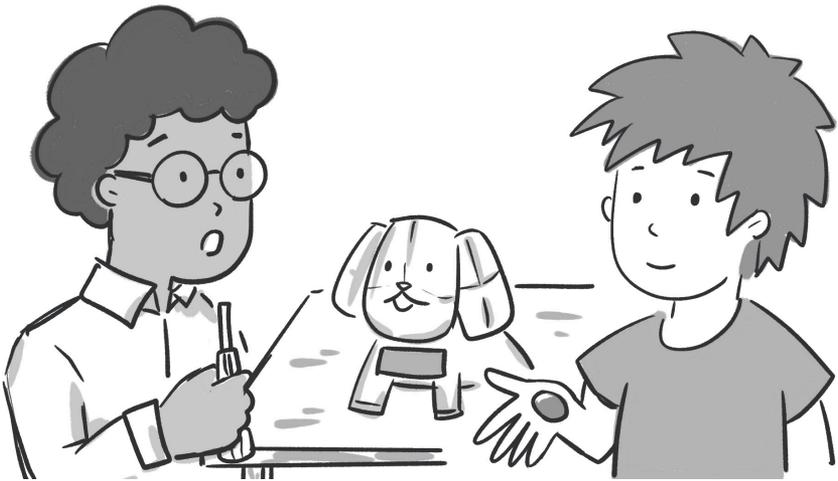
“I can’t believe this...” he whispered.

“Told you,” Eddy said with a shrug and set Newton down. Newton bounced in a happy circle on the desk.

“He’s really mine?” Leo whispered. “You said he’s a... what did you call it? A book spirit? Ms. Denise really can’t see him?”

“Right,” Eddy whispered back. “Ordinary people can’t see Tina’s snake or my little stone either. They’re all book spirits.”

He took the small gray stone from his pocket. It spun in his palm and then hopped onto the desk. It was clearly no ordinary stone at all!



Leo leaned closer and gasped. “Does it have a name?” he asked.

Eddy paused for a second. He had never really thought about that before.

But when Leo asked, a name—clear and simple—popped into his head.

“Pebble.” Eddy said.

He stared at the little bouncing stone and smiled: “His name is Pebble.”

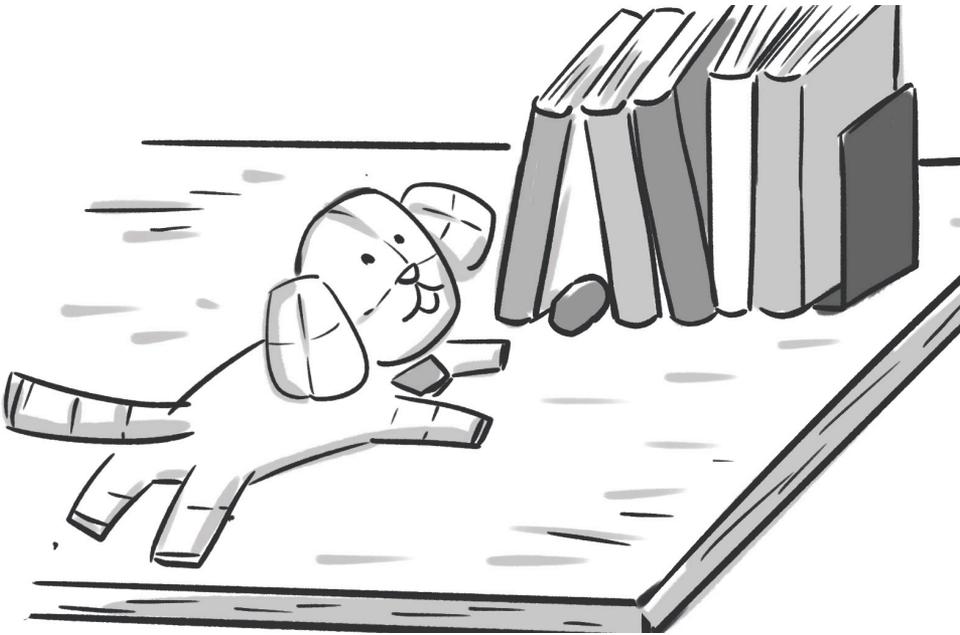


## CHAPTER 2 UNKNOWN OBJECT

Eddy stared at his little gray stone, and gave it a name: “Pebble.”

The little stone seemed quite happy with the name. It bounced up and playfully tapped Newton on its tail.

Newton barked, spun around, and chased the stone. Pebble rolled into a gap between two books and peeked out again.



“How does this even work?” Leo whispered, staring at Newton and Pebble. “They look... alive.”

“I think they are, just like Tina’s green snake,” Eddy said. Then he asked, “Is Newton okay?”

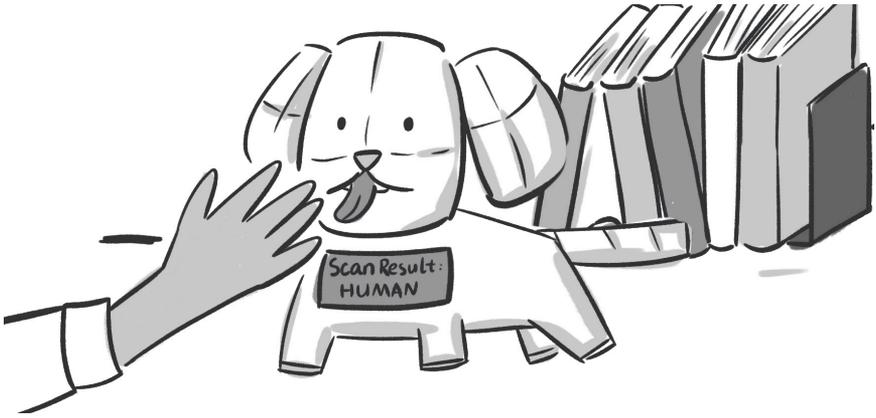
This afternoon, Eddy, Leo, and Tina had gone into the world of *Journey to the West*. They even helped Sun Wukong get his Golden Staff!

But when they returned, Tina’s book spirit Green accidentally sprayed seawater everywhere, soaking the whole room.

Newton also got drenched. Leo had been scared it might short-circuit. He got mad at Tina and then brought Newton straight to the science lab.

“I think he’s fine,” Leo said, patting Newton’s head. “Thank goodness I planned for rain—I added a waterproof coating in his design.”

“Woof!” Newton barked and licked Leo’s hand with its red plastic tongue. Words flashed on its chest screen: **Scan Result: Human.**



Just then, Pebble rolled out from between the books and bumped Newton’s paws.

Newton’s tongue was still out, and it touched Pebble.

“Beep-beep!”

New words appeared: **Scan Result: Stone.**

**Inside:** ——

Eddy paused, his heart jumping with surprise.

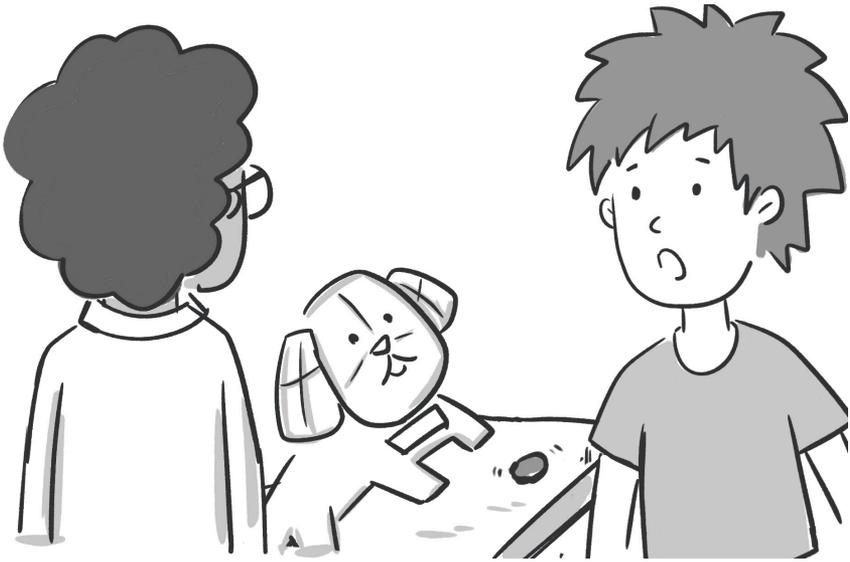
That word—“Inside”—did it mean something was hidden inside his little stone?

Of course! Ms. Vera had said other kids’ book spirits were all animals. Tina’s was a green snake. Leo’s was this robot dog. So maybe his little stone had an animal inside too!

Eddy held his breath, staring hard at the glowing screen. The letters flickered. His heartbeat matched each blink.

At last, the message finished:

**“Scan Result: Stone. Inside: Unknown Object.”**

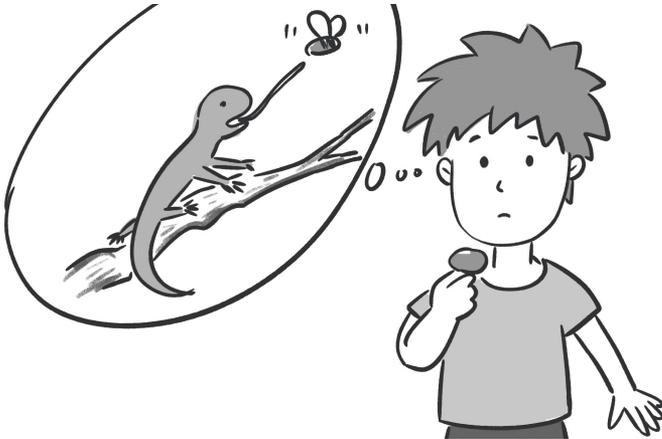


“Unknown object?” Eddy almost shouted. He looked at Newton and begged, “Please, Newton! Try again!”

Newton licked the stone once more. But the words stayed the same—**Unknown Object.**

“Maybe Newton can’t detect it yet,” Leo said. “I mean, it could be a tiny egg that needs to hatch. A dinosaur egg? No, too small. Maybe a lizard egg?”

“Lizard...” Eddy held the stone close. He pictured a lizard flicking its tongue at a bug, and said reluctantly: “Well, maybe.”



He didn’t know what was inside, but he had a feeling that it wasn’t a lizard or gecko. It felt like something else, more special.

“Hi, Ms. Denise! Those pumpkin sprouts look lovely! I’m sure our students will love them.”

A warm, familiar voice came from the doorway. Eddy turned and saw a teacher in a green dinosaur-print shirt. Behind her glasses were calm brown eyes.

“Oh, Ms. Vera!” Ms. Denise exclaimed. She put her seedlings down and gave Ms. Vera a big hug.



“Two of your students are here!” Ms. Denise said brightly, pointing at Eddy and Leo. “I never knew they were such good friends! They seem to get along really well!”

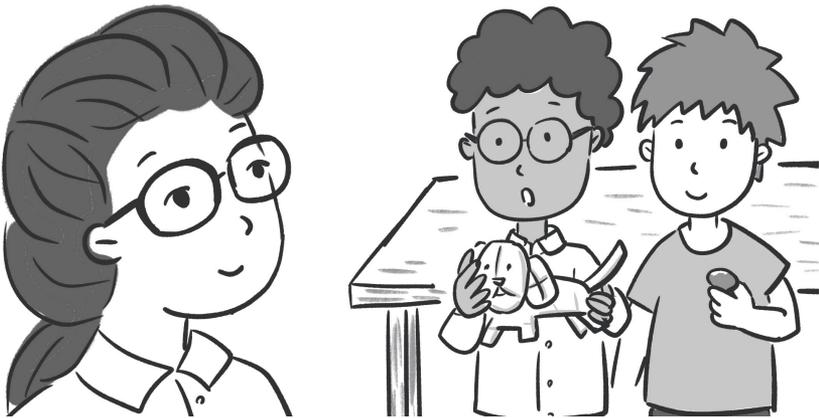
“Of course,” Ms. Vera said with a smile.  
“They both love books. They can be good friends—and great teammates.”

She waved to the boys. “Come on. Let’s go to the cafeteria. We can talk about your *special Mission* on the way.”

“Special mission...?” Leo looked up, his face full of sudden disbelief. He held up the silver robot dog out toward Ms. Vera.

Ms. Vera smiled at him and nodded.

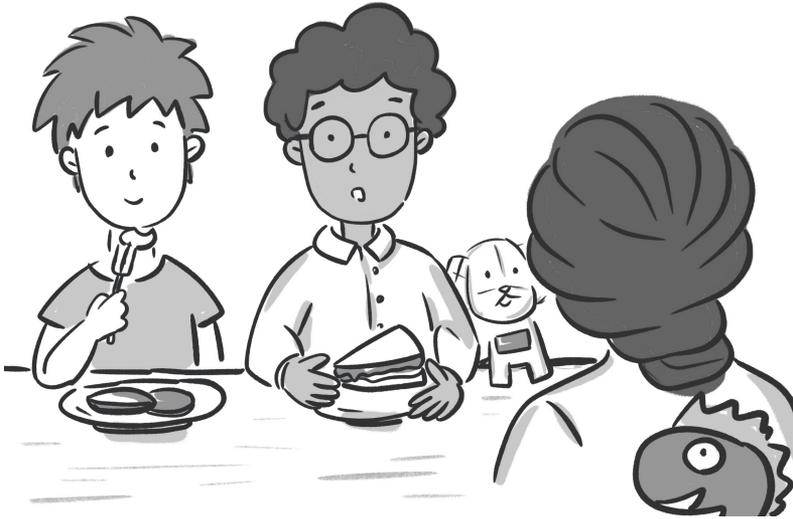
“She knows,” Eddy whispered to Leo, “And she can see them!”



## CHAPTER 3 TROUBLE MAKERS

The sky outside grew darker, but the cafeteria at Forest Elementary was bright with warm yellow lights and the smell of delicious food.

Eddy, Leo, and Ms. Vera found an empty table in the corner and sat down. Eddy picked up his fork and cut off a big piece of buttered pancake.



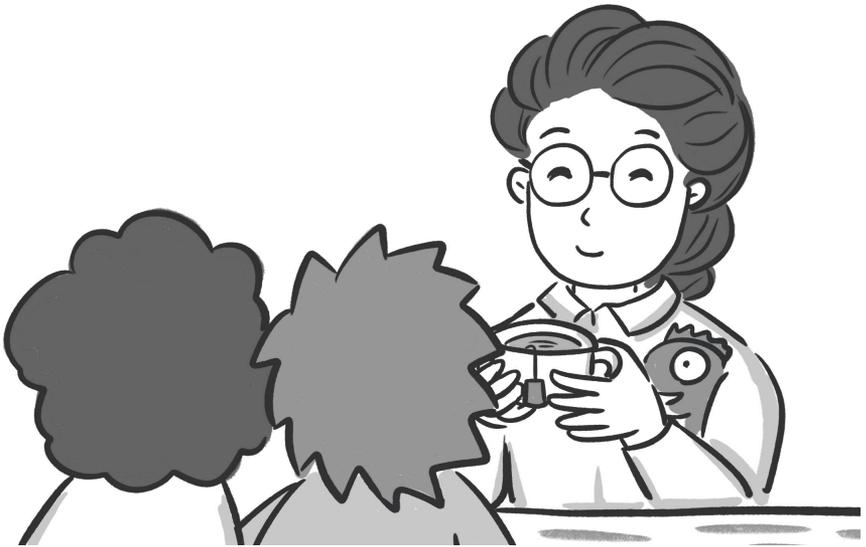
“It’s so good!” Eddy said, stuffing the fluffy, sweet pancake into his mouth.

On their way to the cafeteria, Eddy and Leo had already told Ms. Vera everything—their adventure under the sea, how they helped Sun

Wukong get the Golden Staff, and how they saw a red-haired girl. But Leo still had many questions.

Leo stuffed a big bite of cheese sandwich into his mouth. Before he even swallowed, he asked, “Why do we have book spirits, but others don’t?”

“Well... we still can’t be sure,” Ms. Vera said, taking a sip of warm tea. “But I think book spirits like children who love reading. It’s like the books are choosing their own friends.”



Leo swallowed his bite of the sandwich hastily and asked again, “Ms. Vera, why can you see book spirits? Ms. Denise couldn’t see my Newton at all!”

“Ah, that’s a great question,” Ms. Vera said with a smile. “Maybe it’s because Mr. Ray and I spend so much time in the library. The Book Spirits don’t mind showing themselves to us.”

“Will you ever get a Book Spirit?” asked Eddy.

Ms. Vera shook her head and said regretfully, “I’d like that too, but so far, I’ve only seen children get Book Spirits. Adults can’t enter the story worlds.”



Eddy wanted to ask more, but he suddenly stopped.

A tall, strong man with a shiny bald head was walking toward their table, his face unhappy.

It was Mr.

Benjamin, the dorm manager.

“Ms. Vera, I need to speak with you,” Mr. Benjamin said. His eyes swept over Eddy and Leo, and he looked even angrier.

“Today in math class, some students brought items that had nothing to do with the lesson. I took those items and put them in my office.”

Eddy froze in place. He looked at Leo. Leo’s eyes went wide. They stared at each other.



They both remembered what had happened: Mr. Benjamin had taken Eddy’s *Journey to the*

*West* and Leo’s algebra book away. To get them back, the two boys had worked together—they’d taken Mr. Benjamin’s office door off its hinges and sneaked inside.

No! Mr. Benjamin couldn’t have found out what they’d done. They put the door back and tightened every screw! There were no clues left!

“Here are all the items,” Mr. Benjamin said, placing a box of confiscated things in front of Ms. Vera. Then he looked at Eddy and Leo again.

“But my office was a mess. My chair was even knocked over!”

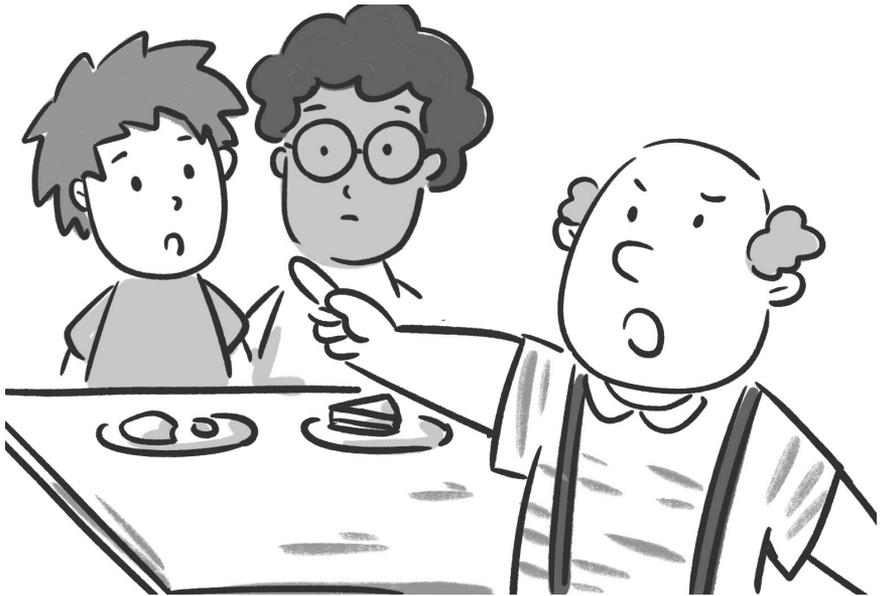


Ms. Vera frowned.

Leo's fork shook against his plate. Sweat began to bead on Eddy's forehead.

Mr. Benjamin grew angrier.

“Someone must have broken into my office! I don't know who, but everything else was still there, except for two books. The same two books I took from him”—he pointed at Eddy—“and him.” He pointed at Leo.



“One was *Jour... Jour... something*, and the other was *Al... Al...*”

“...*Algebra*. And *Journey to the West*,” Leo whispered, then quickly closed his mouth.

“And that’s not all. My son Tom lives in the dorm with these two boys.” He pointed at Eddy and Leo again.

Eddy felt his face burning. He knew what was coming.

“Someone poured water on Tom’s bed today. That’s unacceptable!”

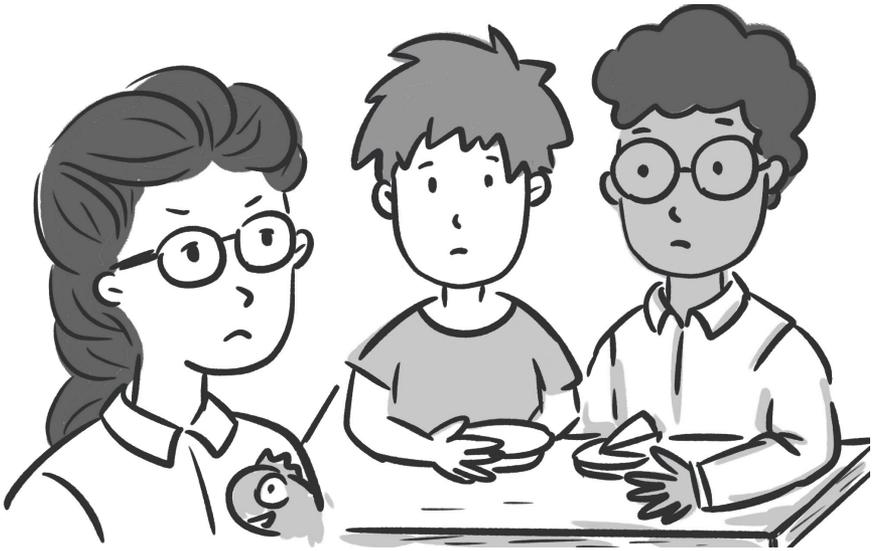
“It was an accident,” Eddy whispered, but Mr. Benjamin didn’t seem to hear.

“And also, Tom lost a new bed sheet. That is too weird!” Mr. Benjamin snorted. Then he turned to Ms. Vera and said angrily:

“You need to pay closer attention to your students’ behavior. I don’t want my Tom picking up bad habits from these troublemakers!”

He turned and stomped away.

Ms. Vera looked at Eddy and Leo. Her face was serious now.



“Well,” she said, “explain what happened. It seems you two have made some trouble.”

Eddy’s eyes met hers, then he looked down right away. Half a pancake and two sausages still sat on his plate, but he didn’t want to eat anymore.

“We took the books from Mr. Benjamin’s office,” Leo admitted right away.

“But it was Newton who knocked over Mr. Benjamin’s chair, and we didn’t have time to pick it up,” Eddy added.

“Newton didn’t do anything wrong!” Leo said, hugging his robot dog tightly.

“All right. I understand. But this must never happen again. If a teacher takes your book away, you can tell me or Mr. Ray. We’ll help you get it back. Understood?”

Eddy and Leo both nodded.

Ms. Vera’s voice softened a little. Then she asked, “Do you know anything about Tom’s sheet?”



“I don’t know,” said Eddy, “I don’t even know which sheet they’re talking about.”

“Me neither,” answered Leo. His face was as confused as Eddy’s.

“Well, I’ll talk with Mr. Benjamin and Tom, maybe they put it somewhere but forgot.” Ms. Vera nodded, and then continued to ask, “What about the water on Tom’s bed?”

“That was Tina’s fault!” Leo said crossly.

“We didn’t mean it...” Eddy explained. “Tina’s snake Green brought seawater back from the book world and sprayed it in the dorm. Mr. Ray said things from the story world only stay in the real world for ten minutes. I think the water must have dried by now...”



“Yes! Tina should apologize! She didn’t even say sorry to me,” Leo said unhappily. “She may have a Book Spirit too, but I don’t want to be on a team with her.”

“But... Tina is actually really nice,” Eddy said in an uneasy voice. “She just rushes into things sometimes...”

“And that’s why I don’t like her!” Leo snapped.

Ms. Vera looked at the two upset boys. She took a sip of her hot tea, then smiled gently.

“Ah,” she said softly. “It looks like we really do have a problem to solve.”



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