

A MUGGING IN MATHS

BY CASSANDRA TSE



Scene: A school. Lunchtime. **RUBY** is sitting on a bench, reading a detective novel.

RUBY (to the audience). It all started when Ms B came to see me.

RUBY takes out a sandwich and is about to take a bite when **MS B** enters.

MS B. Ruby, I'm glad I caught you. I was wondering if you could help me with something.

RUBY (to the audience). Ms B's actual name is Ms Benítez, but everyone calls her Ms B. She's my favourite teacher. (She turns to **MS B.**) What's wrong, Ms B?

MS B. Well ... I've got a bit of a mystery on my hands. And since you love detective novels, I thought you might be able to solve it for me. Sound good?

RUBY. Sounds great! What happened? Stolen jewels? Blackmail? Kidnapping?

MS B. Worse. Someone's smashed my favourite mug!

RUBY (to the audience). Ms B has kept her pens in that mug for years. It says "maths teachers rule" and has a picture of a ruler. It's a pun. I love puns.

MS B. It was perfectly fine when I went to lunch.

RUBY. Who would smash your favourite mug?

MS B. Well, that's what I was hoping you could find out. Here's the evidence. (She hands **RUBY** the broken mug and three pens.)

RUBY. Hmm. One broken mug and three pens: blue, red, and green. I'm on the case, Ms B! Send me the teacher who's on lunch duty.

MS B exits. MR MASTERS enters.

RUBY (to the audience). Mr Masters is what I'd call organised. He uses his label maker to put labels on **everything**: the cupboards, the drawers, the desks, even the coat hooks. He always wears the same outfit: a purple tie, shiny shoes, and a shirt with three purple pens in the pocket. (She turns to **MR MASTERS.**) Mr Masters, did you see anyone near room 12?

MR MASTERS. Hmm. Let's see. I saw a few students. Luke was bouncing a tennis ball down the corridor, and I gave him a talking to. Then Finn ran past and bumped into me. I almost spilled my coffee! Oh, and Sruthi was playing with an air horn – goodness knows where she got it from. It was making an awful racket, so I confiscated it.

RUBY. Thanks, Mr Masters.

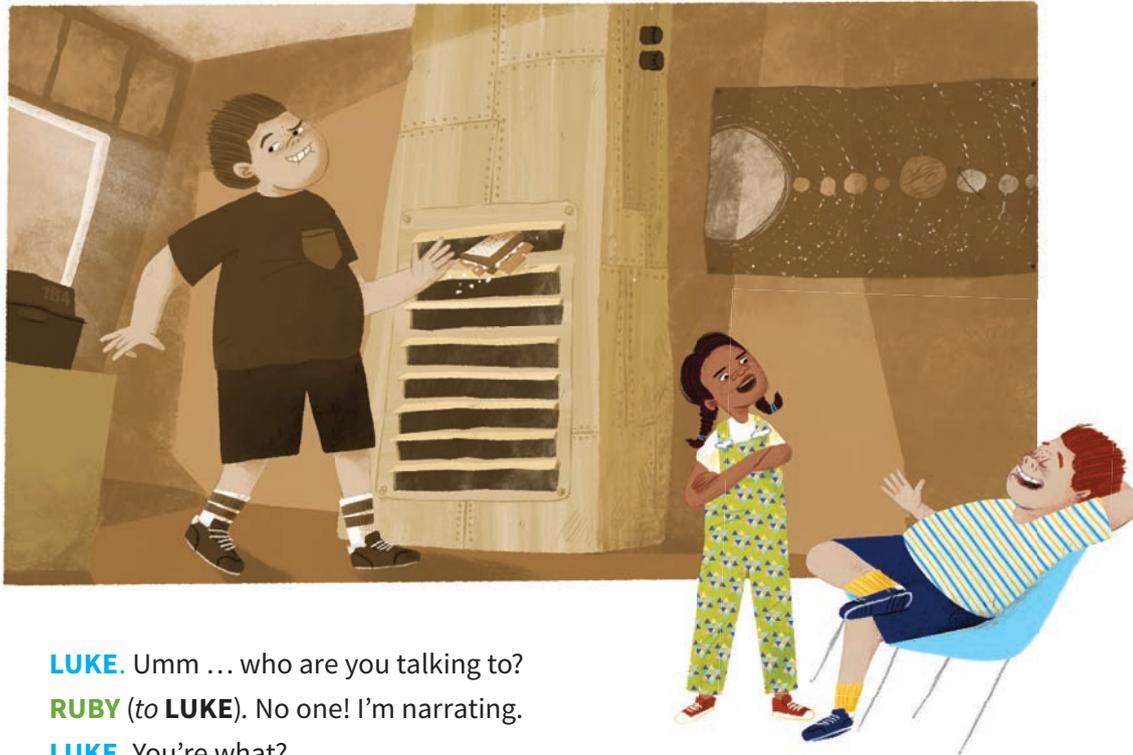
MR MASTERS exits.

RUBY (to the audience). I've got a list of suspects: Luke, Finn, and Sruthi.

LUKE enters.

LUKE. Someone said you were looking for me?

RUBY (to the audience). Luke's always getting in trouble. One time, he jumped onto Mrs Simpson's desk and it collapsed. Another time, he threw a cheese sandwich into the central heating system. The whole school smelt like a toasted cheese sandwich for days.



LUKE. Umm ... who are you talking to?

RUBY (to **LUKE**). No one! I'm narrating.

LUKE. You're what?

RUBY. I'll ask the questions, thank you! (She starts speaking like an interrogator.)

Where were you on the afternoon of Tuesday the third?

LUKE. You mean today?

RUBY. Yeah.

LUKE. Uh, I ate a sandwich, then played wall ball with my friends.

RUBY. Mr Masters saw you bouncing a tennis ball down the corridor outside room 12.

LUKE. Well, yeah, we got bored, and I wanted to see if the walls inside were more fun to bounce off. Mr Masters took my ball and said I could get it back after school. So unfair!

RUBY. Ms B's favourite mug has been smashed. You're sure you didn't accidentally knock it off her desk?

LUKE. Yes, I'm sure! Man, whenever something goes wrong around here, everyone thinks I did it.

RUBY. To be fair, a lot of the time you did do it.

LUKE. Mrs Simpson's desk wasn't my fault! The floor was lava!

RUBY. Did you see anyone else around room 12?

LUKE. Yeah, Finn was in there. He came zooming out with a piece of paper and a guilty look on his face. He smashed right into Mr Masters. It was funny as.

RUBY. A guilty look? Hmm. Thanks for your help, Luke.

LUKE exits.

RUBY (to the audience). Well, unless Luke's lying, he didn't smash the mug. On to the next suspect.

FINN enters.

RUBY (to the audience). Every morning, we do a quick-fire maths test. Finn always gets ten out of ten. He does the extra-for-experts homework, and he's in the library club, coding club, chess club, and choir. I think he has a little crush on Ms B.

FINN. I do not!

RUBY. Well, he would say that, wouldn't he? (She turns to **FINN**.) What were you doing in room 12 earlier?

FINN. Nothing. I haven't gone near room 12 today.

RUBY. That's interesting. Because Luke just said he saw you running out of there in a hurry.

FINN (nervously). Oh, **that** room 12. Uh, I was getting my drink bottle. Why are you asking?

RUBY. Ms B's mug was smashed.

FINN. Oh, no! The maths teachers rule mug?

RUBY. Yep.



FINN. Aw, that's my favourite! I love puns.

RUBY (enthusiastically). Me too. (Back in detective mode.)

Anyway, you're telling me you didn't see anything suspicious?

FINN. Um ...

RUBY. If you went into class to get your drink bottle, why did Luke say you were holding a sheet of paper?

FINN. Oh, all right! I mucked up the quick-fire maths test this morning. I forgot to move the decimal point for question eight. It was such a tiny mistake I thought why not just take the test and fix it up before it was marked?

RUBY. You were **cheating**?

FINN. No! Well, maybe a little bit. I didn't want to lose my record. I've had ten out of ten all year! (He takes a piece of paper from his pocket and shows **RUBY**.) But it didn't matter anyway. Ms B's already marked the tests. There it is. A big purple X.

RUBY. That explains the guilty look ...

FINN. But I didn't touch the mug! It was perfectly fine when I last saw it.

FINN exits.

RUBY (to the audience). Finn isn't the goody-good he's always seemed – but he didn't break the mug, either.

SRUTHI enters.

SRUTHI. Ruby, is this going to take long? I have plans for my lunch break.

RUBY (to the audience). Sruthi is always doing pranks. Last term, she put cling film over the door to the classroom. The term before, she snuck into the staff kitchen and put salt in the sugar jar. Mr Masters put a whole spoonful of salt in his coffee! (She turns to **SRUTHI**.) Ms B's mug has been smashed. Know anything about it?

SRUTHI. Nope.

RUBY. You sure? I know you were outside the room earlier. Did you think breaking Ms B's mug would be some kind of a prank?

SRUTHI. No way! My pranks are way more awesome than that. Remember the thing with the Batman mask? And the spaghetti?

RUBY. That one was pretty funny.

SRUTHI. It was **gold**!



RUBY. So what's the prank you're planning for today?

SRUTHI. It's a surprise, but it's not gonna work unless Mr Masters gives me back my air horn. I was testing it, and he came right out of room 12 and snatched it off me!

RUBY. Wait. Mr Masters was **in** room 12?

SRUTHI. Yeah.

RUBY. But that means ... aha! It all makes sense.

SRUTHI. It does?

RUBY. I've solved the mystery!

EVERYONE enters.

RUBY. The person who broke the mug was Mr Masters! He just wanted to get his purple pen, which Ms B had borrowed. But as he was taking it out of the mug, Sruthi blew the air horn, and Mr Masters was startled and knocked the whole thing onto the floor.

FINN. How'd you work that out?

RUBY. Easy. Your test is marked in purple pen, but there were no purple pens at the scene of the crime. Mr Masters has all three in his pocket, like always.

MS B (turning to **MR MASTERS**). Is this true?

MR MASTERS. She's right. I'm so sorry! I didn't realise that was why Ruby was asking about kids in the corridor or I would have explained myself straight away. Can I buy you a replacement?

MS B. As long as it has a maths pun on it.

MR MASTERS. Of course. I love puns.

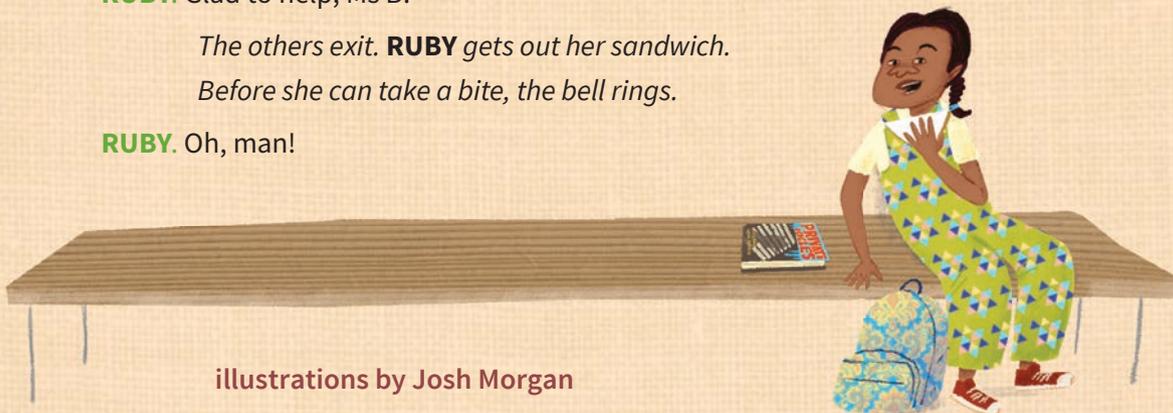
MS B. Thank you, Ruby. You could give Sherlock Holmes a run for his money!

RUBY. Glad to help, Ms B!

*The others exit. **RUBY** gets out her sandwich.*

Before she can take a bite, the bell rings.

RUBY. Oh, man!



illustrations by Josh Morgan

A Mugging in Maths

by Cassandra Tse

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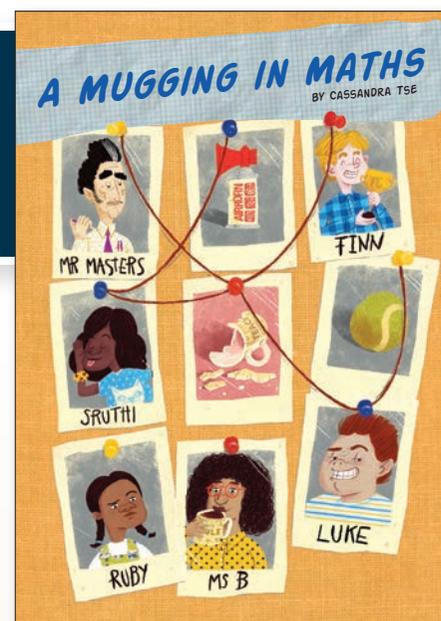
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