

‘Before Tiki Pu could answer, Granny White Eyes said quietly to herself, “I wonder why the Baron always smells so unpleasant. He has plenty of money for hot water.”

‘The Baron went red and jumped to his feet, but my father quickly spoke up. “We were wondering if you would all be so kind as to tell us where you were on Saturday night? Someone might have seen or heard something that would help. Tiki Pu?”

‘Tiki Pu shrugged. “I haven’t been near Soh Meen’s house for a week.”

‘My heart sank. Tiki Pu had been my surest suspect.

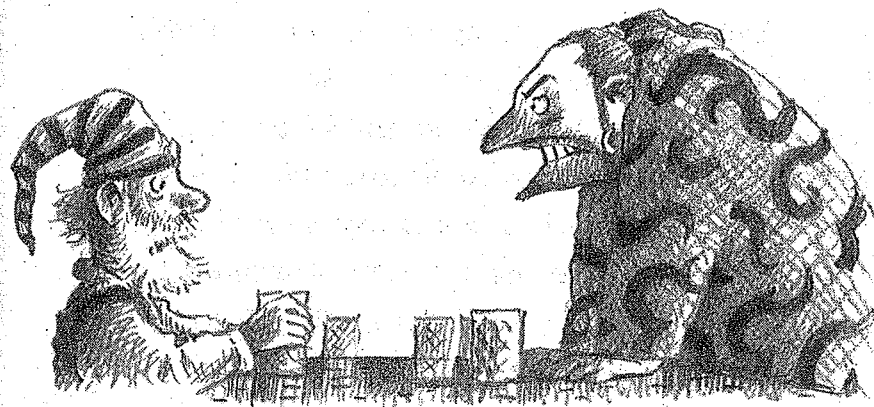
‘Not Yet suddenly piped up. “Teacher Pang and I were in Soh Meen’s garden that evening. We were keeping watch because we’re sure he’s the one who has been dumping his rubbish in other people’s garbage bins. He’s too mean to pay for a big enough bin for himself.”

‘Soh Meen choked on his lemonade.

“But he didn’t leave his house that night,” Not Yet went on gloomily, “so it was a waste of time.”

“How dare you talk about me like that!” shouted Soh Meen.

“No, I never would have dared to before,” said Not Yet. “I don’t know what came over me.”





“Teacher Pang turned to the Baron.  
“Did you see anything odd or unusual that evening, Baron?”

“The Baron cleared his throat and was surprised to hear himself say, “No, I was at the other end of the village smashing Mrs Yang’s best melons. I am determined to win the prize for the biggest melons at this year’s harvest festival, you see.”



“Everyone gasped and looked at their hands, or the floor.

“I didn’t see anything either, I’m afraid,” said Mrs Ping after an awkward pause. “I only went outside once during the evening because Mr Ping made the most dreadful smell and I had to get some fresh air.”

“I think he’s just done it again,” said Luk Ahead, who was sitting closest.

“He thinks, just because they’re silent, no one will notice,” Mrs Ping said confidingly to Luk Ahead.

“The silent ones are the worst,” said Teacher Pang.

“Well, I never knew that,” said Mr Ping wonderingly. “You should have told me, dear. Next time we have beans, *I’ll* be the one to step outside.”

‘Mrs Ping smiled and patted his hand across the table. “Thank you, Ping dear.”



‘There was a silence as everyone looked at the only person who hadn’t explained where they’d been. “Well, *I* certainly didn’t kill any fish,” Luk Ahead said angrily.

“No, I know you didn’t. I did,” whispered Mrs Soh Meen.

“YOU!” thundered her husband.

“Yes. It was all a terrible accident. I dug a hole at the bottom of the garden near the fish pond to get rid of some bad oil. It must have leaked into the pond overnight and killed the fish. It was wrong to let Tashi take the blame,” she went on dreamily as the lemonade did its work, “but I knew I would never hear the end of it if I told my husband that it was *my* fault. He really is an awful bully. And Tashi, well, he doesn’t have to *live* with him.”



‘No one spoke. Soh Meen cleared his throat and rubbed his nose.

“It really is a strange smell. Perhaps it’s bad breath,” said Granny White Eyes, nodding at the Baron.

Or the terrible tobacco he smokes,” Mrs Ping replied. “At least Mr Ping doesn’t do that.”

“I’m not listening to any more of this,” shouted the Baron as he stormed out of the house. “I was expecting a pleasant evening deciding about Tashi’s punishment, not insults.”







'My father thought he had better bring the meeting to an end before anyone else said something they would later regret, but he didn't close the door quickly enough to stop the Baron hearing Mrs Ping say to Granny White Eyes, "That *was* an interesting evening. Why don't we call in on Mrs Yang and see if she knows what happened to her melons?"

'Hmm,' said Jack, taking another cupcake. 'I wish we had a Truth Potion at our school.'

Just then there was a knock at the door and Angus Figment walked in. 'Guess what everyone. Trouble confessed about the mermaid!'



'How come?' asked Mum. 'Did you talk to him about what it means to be a friend and how he has to take responsibility?'

'Yeah, a bit, but you know how he's always pestering me to lend him my book *Secrets of the Tomb*? Well, I said he could have it for the weekend if he owned up. Plus I said I'd draw a really spooky jackal on him if he confessed straight away. So he did. You know, he's not so bad, Arthur Trouble, when you get to know him. May I have some cake, to go with the tea?' He shot a worried glance at Tashi. 'They're not Ghost Cakes or anything though, are they?'



CHILDREN'S  
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