

*It was a Sunday night, and Miss Moore had only one more report to grade. She had grown weary of reading all of the children's reports. None of them were anything more than a list of facts with added words to form completed sentences. It had become a very laborious chore. All Miss Moore really wanted was to go to bed. With great effort, Miss Moore opened up the report on William Shakespeare by her students Benny, Jackie, and Peter. It began as a typical, innocent report, but nothing could've prepared Miss Moore for the content found within the pages.*

It seemed like a typical day when Benny, Peter, and I started researching William Shakespeare at the Charleston Town Library, but the day was far from ordinary.

"Hey look, here is a good book on William Shakespeare full of facts," Benny said eagerly as he held open a very dusty, thick, and old brown book. "Apparently it was written by Shakespeare himself!"

"That's impossible," Peter argued as he straightened his glasses and smoothed his short brown hair. "An autobiography on William Shakespeare was never written."

Peter and I started to skim the book together anyway. It was full of old time language that seemed impossible to read.

"Whoever wrote this must be a Shakespeare expert, like myself. I know everything about William Shakespeare!" boasted Peter loudly, which resulted in being shushed by the librarian.

Peter continued to flip through the old dusty book's pages full of unfamiliar words and foreign content, until I spotted something unusual in the book and I stopped him from flipping. Right in the center of one of the pages, covering the text, was a drawing of an old brown wooden chest. Its edges were lined with gold and its latch was silver. It was as beautiful as a rainbow and as old as time.

"Wow, it looks so real!" I marveled, unable to contain the smile that the chest's beauty triggered from within me.

Benny agreed with me as he slowly reached out to touch the brown chest. As soon as his skin brushed up against the thin page his finger went into the chest as if it was real! Benny, Peter, and I exchanged wide eye looks of amazement. Benny slowly stuck his arm in farther, and then his whole head. Before Peter or I could do anything, Benny had disappeared completely into the thin pages of the book.

"Benny!" I cried out in alarm. Without thinking twice about it, I leaped into the chest after him.

I was falling straight down. My hazel eyes were useless because it was completely dark, and my long black hair was flying in all directions. I wondered if

Benny was experiencing the same thing. Then abruptly, I had stopped falling yet I could feel nothing beneath me. The air was very cold and empty. I managed to sit up, but it was still pitch black.

"Benny?" I called out into the darkness.

"Jackie!" He answered me, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

Just then, Peter landed right beside me with a loud thunk. I was so pleased that we were all safe. My satisfaction was quickly replaced with terror. What was going on?

"Hey, I found a wall!" Benny announced happily.

By listening to Benny's voice, Peter and I were able to stumble our way over to where Benny was standing. Sure enough, Benny stood near a huge stonewall.

As Peter babbled on about how scientifically impossible it was for a building to have walls yet no floor, Benny and I began to push on the wall. To our surprise, it instantly collapsed, and the three of us tumbled right out onto a hard wooden floor.

We were in a small, very simple room that contained a wooden table, a decent window, a chair, an odd grey pot, a bed, a small but well-used fireplace, and a wooden chest exactly like the one in the book back at the library.

Benny caught my eye and he rapidly put his finger up to his lips, signaling me to be quiet. I was about to ask him why, when it occurred to me that we were not alone in the room. On the simple bed in the corner, a man was snoring loudly.

Fear was in Peter's eyes, and Benny just looked confused. Before I could figure out what to do, the person slowly stood up. He was a tall and strong man who looked to be in his early thirties. His black hair was flying in all directions because he had just woken. Small dark eyes were his most memorable feature, and they displayed mixed emotions such as sadness, anger, and confusion. He wore a long white nightshirt. His face was creased with lines of stress and depression. The man was holding a dagger in his hand, and he was looking directly at me.

"What art thou doing here?" the man asked rashly. "Thieves! Thy heads shall be cut off, I shall see to it myself!"

"Please, this is all a big mistake," I explained in a panic. "We never meant to be here!"

"Thy hast the nerve to lie!" He spat on the floor.

"Please just let us leave," Benny begged desperately. "We did not take any of your things!"

"Tell me thy names," the man demanded in anger.

"I'm Peter," Peter began nervously, "and this is Benny and Jackie."

"Thy clothing and names are foreign. Thou art not from here," said the man, with no less ferociousness in his voice. "Where is thy home?"

"Far away," replied Benny. "Who are you?"

The man looked surprised. "Surely you know. I am William Shakespeare, of course."

My eyes got wide. Benny, Peter, and I exchanged looks. How could this man be William Shakespeare? He had died long ago. There was no way that this could be happening.

"No, you're not," Peter shot back; completely oblivious that whoever the man was, he had a dagger, and he had the will to use it. "That's impossible! William Shakespeare lived during the time of--"

"Peter!" Benny interrupted. "Stop!"

"Thou art disrespectful and thieves!" exclaimed William Shakespeare. "Thee are to remain here while I goeth and report your crime!"

He left the room, slamming the door behind him and locking it tight.

"This is great," Benny said sarcastically. "We were just locked up by the greatest writer of all times!"

Time passed, and none of us could get the door open. No matter how hard we pushed, it wouldn't budge. We sank down to the floor in despair.

Before too long, the bedroom door slammed open, and in marched William Shakespeare, accompanied by four other men, all holding weapons. Peter and I were frozen in fear, but Benny spotted a small window at the far end of the room and acted quickly.

He opened the small window and leaped out with such grace it seemed he was flying. I leaped after him with Peter close behind me. We heard the angry voices of the men in the bedroom fade away as we grew closer to the ground. Suddenly, I was panicking. I began to flail my arms as I plummeted down. Without realizing what was happening, I felt the warmth of someone's hand in mine. I was hanging in the air, grasping the hand that had caught mine tightly.

Then it occurred to me that Peter was falling straight at me, screaming like a girl. His glasses were on his chin and his face was white. As he came close to me, I quickly caught his hand. Then all three of us were still. We had formed a chain, with Benny grasping the top of a merchants stand, and Peter and I hanging below him. It suddenly occurred to Peter that he was only a foot from the ground. He let go of my hand and hit the ground, and then he tripped, falling right in the dust on his face. Then I carefully climbed down holding onto the tent's supports. Benny slid down with ease.

His deep blue eyes shined with confidence and bravery, even though his jet-black hair was flying in all directions. I, on the other hand, didn't feel brave at all. I was a mess! My long brown hair was in one huge knot that was whipping around my face in the wind, and I was more confused and scared than ever.

The city's narrow streets were packed with shouting merchants and screaming bidders. Noise was everywhere. We could smell the fishy scent of the river. Houses and other buildings were tightly crammed together, lining the streets. The ground was filthy from horses passing through the area. The air seemed easier to breathe than it was at home. It seemed fresher, even though it was overloaded with unappealing scents.

"Oh, how disgusting!" exclaimed Peter, as something hit me in the head. "We *are* back in time! Probably around 1590 or something like that. We must be in England if Shakespeare's here!"

"What? How can you be so sure that we have gone back in time?" I asked, reluctant to believe that the impossible was possible.

Peter responded, "Do you know anyone in the present day that uses a chamber pot?"

Just then, we reached a very small pond. We waded into the cool waters, and then we lay down on the ground.

"I can't believe the greatest writer of all time is out to get us," Benny moaned. "Actually, some people will argue that Shakespeare didn't write any of the plays," Peter said. "Shakespeare just didn't seem to have the background to write plays with such content. Some people think they were actually written by Anne Boleyn, one of the many wives of Henry the eighth. They had one kid, who turned out to be Queen Elizabeth the first, but then Henry the eighth decided to have Anne Boleyn killed. Another person who is commonly thought to be the true author is Edward de Vere. He could have been Queen Elizabeth's son, but it's uncertain. Many have never doubted that William Shakespeare is indeed the true author, but there is no proof either way."

"Peter, we could solve this mystery for our report!" I said excitedly. "Let's just focus on how we are going to get back to Shakespeare's chest without being killed first." Peter replied.

"We'll go at night," Benny said. "Shakespeare will be fast asleep, and there's a chance he won't notice us."

The three of us leaned back against a tree. I hadn't realized how exhausted I had become, and I had fallen asleep very quickly.

When I awoke, the sky was twinkling with stars. Peter was fast asleep on the other side of the tree, and Benny had stationed himself at the top of the tree to keep watch. He heard me stand up, so he climbed down from the tree.

Benny said, "I think it's time we go back to the chest. But we have to be cautious if we want to survive."

The seriousness in his voice scared me a little. It caused me to realize just how real everything was. Nothing was a dream.

We shook Peter awake, and then we headed back to the odd wooden chest. Navigating our way in the dark was difficult, but Peter had an astute memory and he remembered exactly how to get back to Shakespeare's home. Before long we had arrived at his small house.

"Peter, get on my shoulders," ordered Benny. "Jackie, then you get on Peter's shoulders and look inside Shakespeare's room."

We did as Benny suggested and formed a precariously tall tower. I peered into the bedroom and saw that William Shakespeare was indeed fast asleep on his bed. I told Peter we were safe, in a whisper, and he passed my message onto Benny. Then I slowly began to pry the window open. It opened with surprising ease. I tumbled in with no more grace than an elephant, but I managed not to wake Shakespeare. Peter found a way to slither up the wall, stepping on Benny's face in the process. He tripped and fell into the room with even less grace than me. But Benny shot up the wall like a monkey, and he somersaulted right in with us.

"Showoff," Peter murmured.

Benny ignored him and started tiptoeing over to the chest. Even though it had been merely hours since I had seen it last, I had forgotten how stunningly beautiful it was. It seemed very out of place in the simple bedroom of William Shakespeare.

Benny was just about to open the chest when something metal hit him in the head, causing him to collapse. There, holding a large cooking pan stood William Shakespeare.

"Well, I cannot say thy expected to see thee in thy humble home ever again," Shakespeare said with fire in his eyes. "Men have been hunting all around for thee all afternoon. Perhaps thy time has come for the children to meet thy fate!"

Benny had managed to stand up again, and William Shakespeare was just about to hit him again when the anger in his eyes vanished completely, and filled with sadness instead. Shakespeare dropped the pan with a loud thud and collapsed on the wooden floor.

"Oh, my dear boy," Shakespeare stammered. "Thy looketh very much like my dear Hamnet."

"No, I'm Benny," Benny replied uncertainly.

To our surprise, Shakespeare began to sob loudly. "Oh, how I love my precious Hamnet!" William wailed. "He was just about thy age, too, my dear boy! He waseth my beloved son. He died just a young boy, merely eleven years old. He had a twin sister, Judith, who is at loss without her beloved brother. Then there's my sweet Susanna, the eldest. She is also very confused about it all. We buried my dear boy last year in August, 1596. My wife Anne and I find that each day has becometh a chore. Thy heart shall never mendeth! Never!"

I shifted uncomfortably. What was I supposed to say to that?

"However, I must continue thy writing." William said. "I have one play that is almost completed. It includes my love for my dear son. Tis called *King John*. A young boy dies in the play... thou shall see it performed once completed."

"You're a writer?" I asked. Had we just solved one of the greatest mysteries of all time?

"Well of course, my dear!" Shakespeare replied in surprise. "I am a playwright. Surely you havest seen *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, or one of the others, have you not?"

"Not really," Benny answered sheepishly. "I've heard of them, though."

"Oh, thou should see one sometime." Shakespeare's eyes sparkled as he entered the world of imagination and all of his characters.

"I really appreciate your work," Peter told him awkwardly. "I know it'll effect future generations." Shakespeare almost blushed, which made me chuckle.

"We kind of need to go now," Benny said. "It was really nice meeting you."

"Why art thou here again?" Shakespeare suddenly grew confused.

Benny, Peter, and I exchanged smiles, and without a word, opened the wooden chest. It appeared to be just an ordinary and empty wooden chest. It had normal wooden walls and a normal wooden base. Yet when Benny put his leg in, it once again disappeared into the depths of time. Benny leaped in and down he fell. Peter was close behind him. I was alone in the room with Shakespeare, who had gone under the covers of his bed, and he was trembling slightly.

"If you're ever curious about the future," I began to explain, "then jump into your wooden chest."

I could just barely see Shakespeare poke his head out from under his blankets and his eyes widen before I was falling down into the darkness of time travel.

Down, down, down I was falling. But this time, I wasn't nearly as scared. Instead of landing in that odd, floorless and cold room, I found myself back in the library, right beside Peter and Benny.

The chest of time was still there on the pages of the book, waiting for its next victims to take on an adventure. But we had had plenty of adventure for one day, so I quickly slammed the book shut. The back cover bounced back open and I was surprised to see that on the very last page of Shakespeare's autobiography, he talked about time travel. I quickly skimmed the page and found that William Shakespeare claimed he had gone into the future through an old chest in his bedroom. Had that been there before we had gone back in time? I didn't think so. I closed the book in alarm. Had we somehow changed history in a way?

I don't think many people will believe my story, but I am certain that the true author of the plays was William Shakespeare. He told me so himself, after all. However, the rest of the world will remain clueless. As for the chest of time, it sits contently at the Charleston Town Library, waiting for the day it will once more be discovered.

*Miss Moore sat silently, her mouth wide open. What a report! Perhaps she should arrange to have a talk with Jackie, Benny, Peter, and their parents. But Miss Moore couldn't help hesitating. How in the world was she supposed to grade such a paper? Miss Moore found herself imagining the splendor of falling into the chest of time and traveling back to meet William Shakespeare. How magical it would be! She stood up abruptly. She decided to go hunting for the chest of time herself. If there was an adventure to be had, she would be there.*