

CHAPTER SAMPLER

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ON
THE

LOOSE



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ILLUSTRATED BY
GRACE CHEN

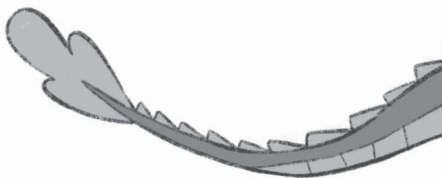


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Summary: In this partially illustrated early chapter book, two young friends bring a friendly dragon statue to life and must find a way to help her get home.

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CHAPTER ONE

“Kyle, take your hand out of the lion’s mouth!” I yelled.

With his hand inside the stone lion’s mouth, my best friend scrunched up his face and asked, “Why, Hailey?”

“Because you’re doing it the wrong way,” I said.

“No, this seems right,” Kyle said. Ever since I’d met him in third grade, he’s always wanted to do things his way. He hasn’t changed in three years.

“You won’t get any good luck that way,” I said.

“How do you know, Hailey?”

“My grandpa taught me,” I said.





Grandpa Wong and I used to visit the China Gate lions once a month. First we'd go to the dim sum restaurant around the corner, where I'd order my favorite dish—shrimp dumplings. He always ordered something different.

One time it was chicken feet. I'd stared at the slimy claws on the plate and pushed away from the table.

"Ew," I said. "No way. I'm not eating feet. Gross."

He laughed as he plucked one of the feet off the plate with his chopsticks and placed it in front of me.

"You'll like it. Tastes like chicken," he joked.

I shook my head, crossed my arms and clamped my lips shut.

“Hailey, don’t be afraid of a new thing. It might be the start of your next adventure.”

“It looks weird,” I said.

“The sooner you try it, the quicker we can get to the China Gate and make a wish.”

“Can I make my wish now? Because I wish you didn’t order chicken feet,” I said.

He laughed again. “Try it, Hailey. Trust me.”

I picked up the foot with my fingers and bit into the flesh. It tasted like chicken skin with a salty sauce. “It’s not that bad.” I took another bite.

“See?” he said with a smile, taking a foot for himself.

I’d finished the rest of mine.

After lunch, Grandpa Wong and I would walk to the China Gate, where a golden roof supported by red pillars formed

an arch over the street. Chinese lion statues sat on either side of the gate. Mounted on top, two Chinese dragon statues that looked like rolling ocean waves met in the center. The wingless creatures seemed to watch over the street like guardians.

Grandpa Wong would lift me onto one of the lions' pedestals. He said if I rubbed the stone ball in its mouth, the lion might grant me a wish. I always wished for the same thing—another dim sum with my favorite grandpa.

The last time I made my wish, it didn't come true. Grandpa Wong died a week later. The next day a windstorm blew one of the dragons off the arch and destroyed it. I felt like the remaining dragon—alone.



“Why did we come here today, Hailey?” Kyle asked.

“Tomorrow the city is tearing the gate down so they can dig a tunnel for the subway.”

“What are they going to do with it?” Kyle adjusted the chin strap of his bicycle helmet.

“My dad told me the gate’s going into storage.”

“That’s too bad. How am I going to get my wish?”

I grinned. “You always want the same thing.” I fished a baggie full of Chewy Worms out of my backpack. He licked his lips at the sight of the candy.

“My wish came true!”

“You’re so predictable.” I tossed the baggie at him.

He plucked out a worm while I climbed onto the lion's pedestal. I rubbed the stone ball the way Grandpa Wong had taught me, rolling my hand over it from left to right. I looked up. The remaining dragon had been Grandpa Wong's favorite part of the China Gate. Mine too. I'd always thought the dragon and Grandpa Wong would be here forever.

"I wish I could save you," I whispered.

The ball began to tingle under my hand. I yanked it out of the lion's mouth.

"What was that?" I muttered.

"What's wrong, Hailey?" Kyle asked. "Make the wrong wish?"

"It's nothing," I said, rubbing my palm. I slowly reached into the lion's mouth again and touched the ball. It vibrated against my palm. A jolt of electricity stung

my hand as a crack of thunder echoed in my ears. Was it from the sky or the lion's mouth? I couldn't tell.



I jumped down and examined my hand. There were no marks, but my palm still tingled from the energy of the ball.

“What is going on?” I exclaimed, my eyes locked on the lion's mouth.

It said nothing.

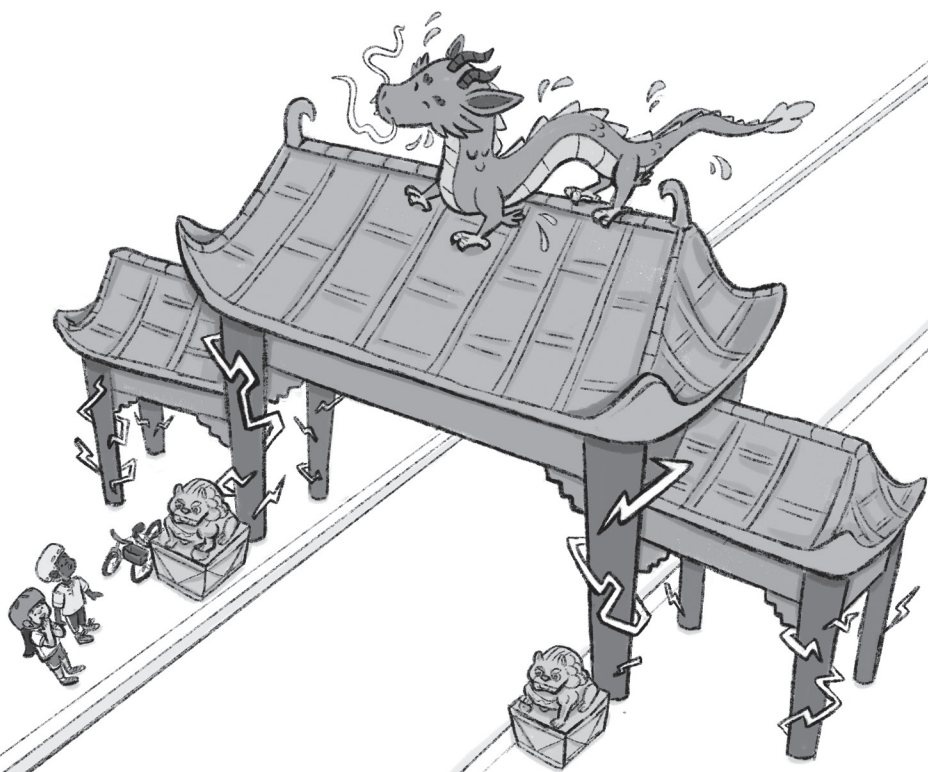
Rain began to fall. Weird. Only one lonely cloud floated above us.

Kyle grabbed my arm and pulled me back from the lion.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“Look!” Kyle pointed straight up at the top of the China Gate.

My mouth dropped open. The dragon was now a brilliant shade of jade. The spines on its back jutted up like a row of shark fins. It shook itself like a wet dog, sending water everywhere. The dragon was alive!





CHAPTER TWO

The dragon's giant head swung to the left and the right, its bright green eyes wide with wonder. Then the beautiful creature slithered to the edge of the roof and peered down at us.

Kyle shouted, "Monster!"

The dragon screeched, leapt off the China Gate and floated to the ground as gracefully as a butterfly. Kyle hid behind me. The beast skittered away on its four giant claws. They looked like rooster claws.

I sprinted to my mountain bike and hopped on.

“Hailey! Where are you going?” Kyle shouted.

I had to catch up to the dragon. It snaked around a corner.

“Wait for me!” Kyle cried.

I wheeled around the corner and into an alley. The dragon was gone. All I could see were a dumpster beside a telephone pole and a large puddle. The only place the dragon could be hiding was inside the dumpster. I hopped off my bike and crept toward it.

I inched open the lid. The stench of garbage shot up my nose—a blend of dirty gym socks, rotten bananas and scared skunk. I gagged as I pushed the lid higher. Giant black garbage bags filled the dumpster almost to the top.

There was no room for another bag, let alone a dragon.

Kyle skidded to a stop.



“You saw how beautiful the dragon was, didn’t you?” I asked.

“Are you kidding me? Did you see its teeth? It could have snapped us in half and had us for a snack.”

“It looked more scared than angry.” I brushed my hair from my eyes and searched for any sign of the creature.

“Let’s get out of here.” Kyle lurched ahead, then stopped and pointed down the alley.

“Hey!” he hollered. “What are you doing?”

Two scruffy teenagers were picking up my bike.

“That’s mine!” I shouted.

The long-haired one got on my bike. Kyle and I rushed over.

“Get away from my bike!”

“Don’t see your name on it,” he sneered.

“Finders keepers,” his friend added, spitting on the pavement.

“Give back the bike,” Kyle ordered.

The lanky teen grinned at his friend. “You could use a bike, Zak.”

“Yeah. And this kid’s ride looks sweet.” Zak grabbed Kyle’s handlebars and shoved Kyle off his bike. His friend laughed as Kyle fell to the ground.

We were alone against the bullies.

“Hey! Don’t you dare take our bikes,” I roared.

“Who’s going to stop us? You?” The tall boy glared at me.

“I’m going to call the police.”

Zak climbed onto Kyle’s bike. “We’ll be long gone by then.”

GRRRR!

The teens’ mouths dropped open. They pointed behind me. I turned around. The dragon towered over us.

