



## prologue

“Tessie! Stop! Stop!”

We were playing catching and my cousin Ming was the appointed catcher.

I thought to myself, “Haha! Did he really think I would stop, just because he had asked me to?” I knew that he was trying to trick me into slowing down, so he would be able to catch me more easily. I ran all the faster.

“Tessie! Your shoe! Your shoe!”

My shoe? I slowed down, but only stopped running when I felt Ming’s hand come down heavily on my shoulder. Gleeful that I had managed to make him run so much, I turned to face Ming.

His face was all red, and he was huffing and puffing. He was also holding a shoe in his hand!

More specifically, in his hand was a shoe that should have been on my foot!

All the people in the restaurant, where we had started our impromptu game, could see that my shoe had fallen off. Strangely, I hadn’t even felt it.

Stranger, though, to think that I would have felt it.



Older brother, or Koko as I called him, always called me names and actually laughed when I got angry – which made me even angrier. He called me “Pig” and “Mad Girl” and said that I had a lion’s mane, not hair. I think he was jealous of my thick straight hair, because he had curly, girly ringlets.

One day, when he called me names yet again, I just could not control myself anymore.

I reached down, pulled off my right leg, and flung it at him in a fit of pique.

Yes, I really did.





at the very beginning

I didn't always have a wooden leg (actually, it isn't wooden... but more on that later).

I was born with two legs, two arms, two eyes, one mouth, one nose, et cetera, one November evening. My two sisters, Dajie (eldest sister, in hanyu pinyin) and Erjie (second older sister), were very happy to have a real, live doll to play with, but Koko, not quite two years older than me, made an ugly face when he was told I was not a boy.

Dajie read a lot. She told me what to do, but didn't get upset when I didn't listen. One day, she told me that as I had very thick hair, I had to wash it extra well, otherwise I would be the smelly one in the family. I thought it might have been quite fun to be the smelly one in the family!

Erjie liked to draw. She drew paper dolls and cut them out. She also drew beautiful clothes for the dolls. I knew she sold the dolls and clothes to her friends, but Mummy didn't know about it and I was not to tell her. Erjie sometimes gave me some of the money she received from selling the paper dolls.

Erjie was also very good at pulling out shaky teeth! She had pulled out three of my baby teeth already without it hurting, so I thought that when she grew up she would become a dentist.

Koko was the smiley and affectionate one in the family. He smiled readily at everyone and hugged and kissed Mummy frequently. Koko has always been the angel (and hero) in the family.

When I was about four years old, I wanted to see how flowers tasted. I grabbed a few stalks straight from a soil patch in the garden and stuffed them into my mouth. Before I could chew, I heard Koko shriek, "Mummy! Tessie's eating flowers!" I was made to spit out the buds,



petals and stalks, and Mummy gave me a long lecture. Koko stood by smirking. Till now, Koko still reminds me how he had “saved me” from “being poisoned”.

Even now, he also reminds me often how he once saved both our lives. It was when Mummy had left us in the car while she went on a quick errand. Just for fun, I grabbed the handbrake and pressed it down. The car

started gliding slowly and freely. I didn't know what calamity might have ensued, but



Koko came to the rescue! He quickly pulled the handbrake up and saved the day. He had saved my life again!

Koko and I used to have swimming lessons together. I think that we kept being lumped together to do things because we were close in age. One time, I had to practise kicking in the water. I really enjoyed it and was kicking happily and

noisily. But when Coach Sam grasped my foot, I suddenly felt a great pain shooting up my leg. I jerked my leg away and burst into loud tears. Poor Coach Sam was shocked. Koko jumped up from his side of the pool and ran over to me. Mummy also came running over, asking, “What’s the matter? What’s the matter?”

I think Mummy had a feeling this was not my usual fussing, but that something could really be wrong.



- 1 -

What do you do when  
your brother or sister  
calls you names?

For a start, you could probably respond by calling them names, and use even uglier and more horrible-sounding ones too. But that would probably lead to a fight, and also to you being scolded by your parents.

I realise that my brother called me names (and still does, even now, although he is 43 years old!) because he didn't really know how else to talk to me! That was his way of showing me that he loved me, cared for me and really wanted to help me. He just didn't know what to do.



- 2 -

What if you find out that someone doesn't like you?

You would probably feel very hurt and maybe a little angry. You may even start listing in your mind all the reasons you also don't like him/her. But this would make you angrier and, before you know it, you would have a permanently unpleasant expression on your face. No, no! Don't let that happen!

Instead, you could think through whether there was anything that you have done to hurt that person. If there was, do go and say you are sorry. But if there was really nothing that you had done, then forgive that person, and continue to be pleasant to him/her.

Also, remember that it is alright if some people don't take to you – not everybody will like you as much as your mummy and daddy do!

