



Just Another Boring
Day In School

But Mum, I don't wanna go to school!"

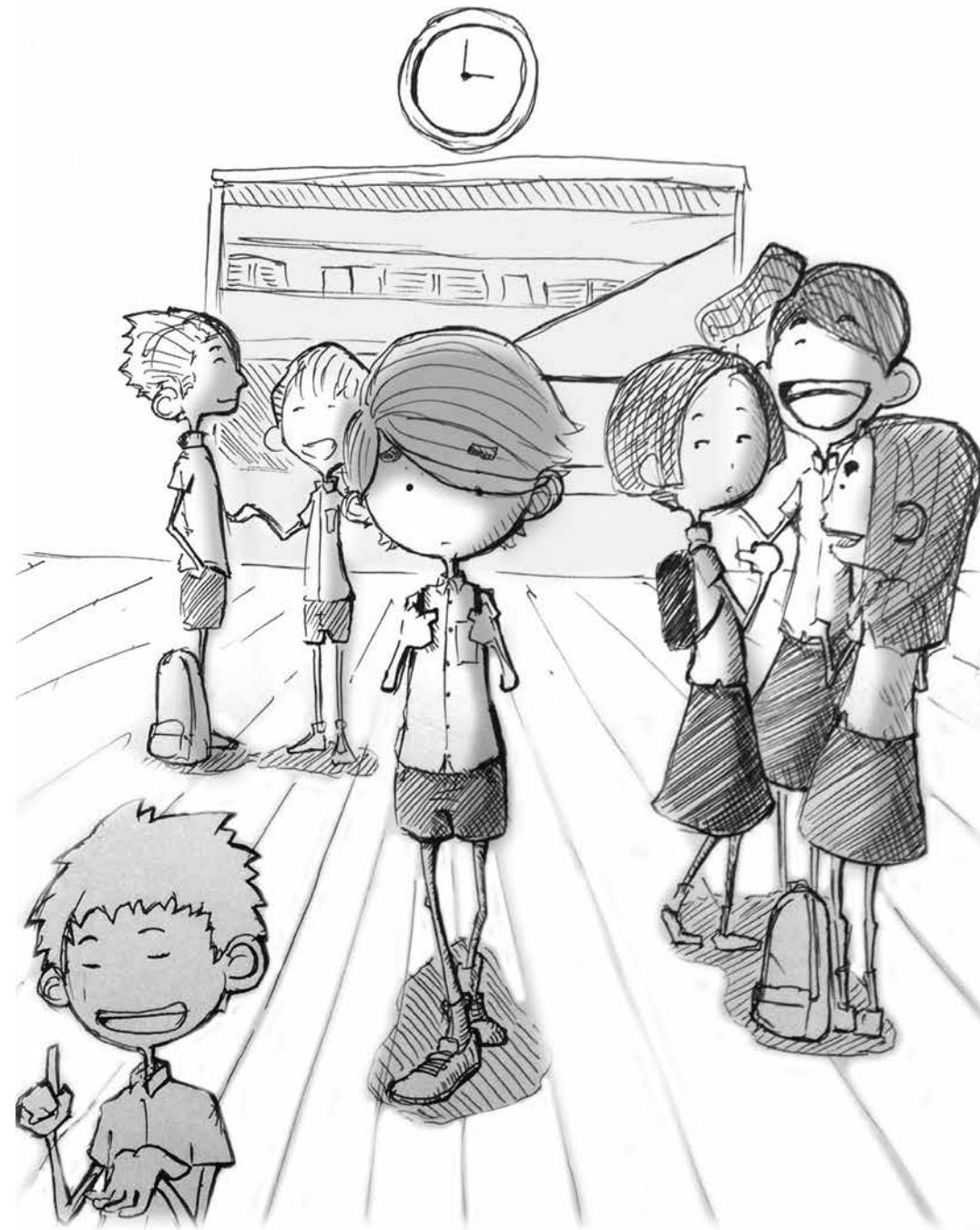
"Ryan! That is not possible. Now, stop that! You've said that, like, fifty times this morning!"

Mum was not happy. Neither was Ryan. Going to school every morning was a chore. Mum didn't like driving through the traffic jams. Ryan just didn't like going to school.

He was new at school. Everyone else in his Primary 5 class had been in the class since the beginning of the year. Ryan was the only new boy in class, having just returned to Singapore from the US, where he had been living for more than eight years. Ryan's parents had left Singapore when he was two years old to work in the US.

At school in Singapore, nobody talked to him or played with him at recess. The fact that he spoke with a "funny" American accent didn't help at all.

"Mum! I have a tummy ache!"



"Too bad. We're stuck. Do you see all these cars? You'll have to wait until you get to school to go to the bathroom."

"But I have to poop! NOW!"

Mum turned up the music. Obviously, this was not going to work on her again.

It had worked two days ago. When Ryan doubled over from his "tummy ache", she had made a sharp U-turn. But, instead of driving him home, she had sped all the way to the hospital. They waited for four hours to see a doctor.

Mum wasn't very pleased when the doctor said that there was nothing wrong with Ryan's tummy. But she didn't scold him. She didn't punish him. With her lips squished tight into a line, she drove him home. She even told Ryan he didn't need to do any homework to make up for skipping school. She was so nice Ryan began to get nervous.

After tucking him into bed, she walked into the kitchen and came back with a grim smile on

her face. "Here, take this," she said, holding out a spoon. "For your tummy ache."

Ryan looked at the disgusting yellowish liquid on the spoon. He had no choice. He held his breath and swallowed it. It was really nasty! But he was afraid to protest. So, he kept quiet. At least he had gotten out of school.

Mum's voice snapped him out of his daydreaming. They had reached school!

"Okay! We're here. Be good; listen to your teachers. And have a nice day!" Mum said in her fake-happy voice.

Ryan groaned. That fake-happy voice was the "don't mess with me" signal that Ryan had learned to always obey. He should have known better than to try the same trick twice on Mum. He would need to think of a better ruse tomorrow. For now, there was no escaping school.

He peered out the window at the drab beige building that was the school's main building. Beige was a colour Ryan liked the least. Beige!



What could be more boring? What was worse was that the beige was almost grey from the years of accumulated dirt on the walls. When Ryan first arrived at the school, he was terrified to touch the walls. Ryan didn't like dirt. He liked everything spotless and white.

He could already see other students milling around near the assembly area. In his school in the US, the kids could play in the playground before school started – and school didn't start so early in the morning. Ryan missed school in the US, especially his best friend, Leo, whom he had left behind. They would meet each other first thing in the morning. Here, he had no friends and no one to look forward to meeting in the morning.

Ryan got out of the car reluctantly. He dragged his feet onto the sidewalk. His backpack felt like a ton of bricks. He still couldn't understand why he had to bring so many textbooks to school. Slowly, he put one foot forward and began to shuffle past the school gate towards the assembly area.

He felt himself lunging forward. Ouch! That hurt! He stopped himself from falling face first onto the pavement, just in time. As he looked up, he saw Bruce staring right back at him. He had a mean grin on his face. Ryan froze.

Bruce was a big brute of a kid. He was in Primary 5, like Ryan, but he was really a year older than the other Primary 5 kids. He was also the school bully.

In his mind, Ryan wanted to swear at the bully, but he was terrified. Bruce was a whole head taller than Ryan. So he kept quiet and stared down at his shoes.

Bruce needed no further invitation. Pomp! Bruce stomped down hard on Ryan's foot. Ouch! That hurt even more!

As Bruce ran off laughing, Ryan saw a huge grey mark on his right shoe. What a great way to start the morning... not! He didn't like dirt and he didn't like grey marks on his spotless white shoes. Ryan scowled as he walked over to his class in the assembly area. As usual, none of his classmates



talked to him. He sat at the back of the line by himself. He fiddled with his school bag, trying his best not to look awkward and out of place.

The vice-principal was at the microphone. She seemed to love the sound of her voice ringing out across the school during assembly. Ryan couldn't understand why she had so much to say



every morning. Most of the time, Ryan wouldn't be listening.

But today, she had someone else next to her.

"Students, I want to introduce you to a new teacher who is joining us today. This is Mr Khoo and he will be the science teacher for the Primary 5 classes, from 5A to 5D."

The man next to her smiled and waved.

"Can we please give Mr Khoo a warm welcome?"

Right on cue, the students clapped and droned in a fake-chirpy chorus the lines they had been trained to say when greeting a new teacher, "Good morning, Mr Khoo. We are happy to meet you, Mr Khoo."

Ryan did not join in the chorus. He still felt it strange to recite a greeting on command. In the US, he never had to greet teachers like this.

So, he's the new science teacher, Ryan thought. Except, Mr Khoo wasn't really very cool. He had odd hair that made him look older than he actually was. He wore thick

Ryan and Rex

black-rimmed glasses and spoke in a high-pitched voice.

“Students, thank you for the warm welcome. I love science and I want to make it fun for you. I hope you will enjoy my class.”

Another round of applause rang out. Ryan cringed. That voice, he thought, is going to be unbearable. Still, science was his favourite subject. He hoped that Mr Khoo’s class would be as fun as he promised.



The Science Class