

New Tales of Judge Pao: Young Judge Pao investigates the mystery of Pi

It was a fine sunny morning after a rainy week in a small village near Hefei, China. RootPi, a 9-year old boy, discovers that his pet dog Pi is missing. He immediately runs to find his most trusted friend Pao Zheng to help solve the mystery.

RootPi finds Pao near the hills, collecting firewood with his mother. Huffing and puffing he tries to tell Pao everything that had happened.

Pao wiped the sweat of his crescent-shaped birthmark on his forehead and said, "RootPi, you sound quite irrational, and I can't quite make out all the details."

With his mother's permission, Pao accompanies RootPi back to the village to investigate. They run down the hill, dash across the rickety wooden bridge, shoot past the giant Pagoda, and finally reach RootPi's house.

RootPi shows Pao where Pi and he had been playing the previous evening. They find a few little footprints in the wet mud.

"Those are Pi's and my footprints," said RootPi.

"Yes, but whose are those?" said Pao pointing at some gigantic footprints near the dog kennel.

Pao studied them carefully and followed the footprints to the back gate.

Outside the gate, they bumped into Mrs. Fibonacci, "RootPi, I just found your dog's collar near the stream."

Pao and RootPi thanked her and ran to the part of the stream that Mrs. Fibonacci had pointed to. Now things had begun to add up.

At the stream, they interviewed a woman washing clothes who said she heard some angry barks from a little dog a few hours ago. However, the Boatman said he heard nothing. Things were getting suspicious.

As the boys were checking behind the bushes near the stream, Pao found a secret passage.

RootPi exclaims, "Look! There are a lot of footprints here."

RootPi and Pao went into the passage. It got deeper and deeper. They went left, right, left, left, right, right, left, right and finally came into a smelly room. It was full of pet animals in cages. They saw cats, mice, rabbits, hamsters, parrots, spiders, tortoises and a very cute and cheeky monkey. But they did not see any dog, not even one.

Suddenly, the monkey started to clatter as though to warn them. The two boys, suddenly, heard the sound of heavy footsteps and quickly hid between the cages. A man came into the room with a big box. It was the Boatman! The box he was holding started to bark. How strange? Pao and RootPi looked at each other and silently nodded to each other. They had to work together to get out of this tight corner. They stealthily opened the cages and let the animals out. The animals ran helter-skelter. In the

hullabaloo that followed, the guard dropped the box and Pi jumped out of the box and smelled his way to RootPi.

RootPi exclaimed ecstatically, "Pi, we found you! We are together again now."

Both the boys acted quickly and escaped from the room. But, they could hear the Boatman thundering behind them.

Pao, RootPi and Pi got back to the stream and ran to some of the King's guards, who were leading their horses to the water. By then the Boatman had also caught up to them.

"Guards! The Boatman is a thief." Young Pao firmly yelled, "He stole my friend's dog and many other pets too."

The Boatman, angrily shouted, "These pesky boys are the ones who stole my dog. Don't listen to them, I often see them together, thick as thieves, playing pranks and causing trouble in the whole village."

RootPi hugged his dog Pi and started to wail and cry. But, Pao acted confidently.

He swiftly covered Pi's furry little eyes and said, "Okay, you say this is your dog? Then tell me, which eye is he blind in?"

The Boatman hesitated momentarily and answered, "The right one, of course."

Pao opened Pi's right eye and it rolled and sparkled with amusement.

"Oh! My mistake, it was the left eye. Yes, the left one is blind." Boatman said apologetically.

"Ha! That proves you are the thief."

Pao lifted Pi for everyone to see. The little dog barked and looked curiously at everyone with his cute black button eyes.

The guards caught the Boatman and then helped rescue all the other pets from the secret passage and returned them to their owners.

The Captain of the guards was impressed with Young Pao's cleverness and said, "You are a talented boy. You should write the imperial exam when you grow up and then you can serve the Emperor."

Young Pao smiled and bowed deeply with gratitude, "Thank you Sir, but today I need to help my mother gather some more firewood."

The three companions Young Pao, RootPi and Pi trotted off along the stream and into the rolling hills, where maybe another adventure awaited them!