

The Lost Book



“**J**ACKIE! SASHA IS waiting outside!” I hear Dad shouting from downstairs.

“OK. I’ll be there in a sec.” I run into my sister’s bedroom. “Have you seen my library book?”

“No. Why?” She smiles innocently.

“Because last week my library book was eaten by your hamster.”

“The week before that,” retorts my sister, “you dropped your library book in the aquarium.”

I do one last check in the big bathroom. Sometimes I read in the bathtub.

“What’s taking you so long, Jackie?” Dad’s voice thunders through the house.



Wait! Maybe the librarian, Ms. Silverfish, will let me renew it.



If you ask, I’m guessing she retorts — quickly answers with anger or a clever argument — “You’re out of luck. No Super Duck!”



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“I need to find my library book. It’s due today.” I bounce down the stairs and nearly bump into a walking pile of clothes—which is really Dad carrying an overloaded laundry basket.

“Good luck with that one. The library closes in fifteen minutes.” He stops to grab my overalls from the railing and wrinkles his nose. “I’m putting these in the laundry.” I practically live in those. “Gosh, they’re heavy,” says Dad. He disappears down the basement stairs.

“Because they’ve got super-handy oversized pockets,” I shout. “Hey. You haven’t seen my library book, have you? It has a red cover.”

“No, and your mother and I are *not* paying any replacement fees anymore, Jackie!” yells Dad from the basement. “This time it’s coming out of your own pocket.”

“That’s the least of my worries. If you lose three books, you’re not allowed to check out any books for a month. A whole month!” I run around the house, looking under the couch, in the fridge, and behind the piano. I check the broom closet, the fruit bowl, and the windowsills. Where is that library book?

You have to pay replacement fees — money charged to buy new things to take the place of lost or damaged things.

She probably had to buy a new copy.



Dad walks into the living room. “Aha,” he says suddenly. “I picked you up from basketball last night. Maybe it’s in the car.”

Of course! I always read in the car.

“But I think Mom just left to run some errands,” he adds.

He’s right. Mom pulls out of the driveway at that very moment. No! No! No! “Mom, wait!” I sprint through the hallway, grabbing my coat and helmet as I go.

I jump on my bike. “Come on, Sasha.” I see our car’s taillights turn the corner at the end of our street. “We’ve got to catch her.”

“But what about the library?” Sasha asks as she mounts her bike. “It’s about to close.”

“Got to get the book first!” We chase after her. “Mom, stop!” I yell. She doesn’t see or hear me. In the distance, I see her pull over and take a box out of the trunk, a box with a red book lying on top. She empties out the box into the neighborhood recycling bin. Then she’s on her way again. We bike as fast as we can.



Well, hello, Thistle.
Hello, Keet. Can I help
you find something?



Yes, Ms. Silverfish, we want to know
how to say mommy and daddy in
every language, please.



We wanna know
if they all sorta
sound alike
everywhere.





As soon as we get there, I let my bike fall and start digging around in the bin. Sasha comes around to the other side. Standing on our tippy toes, we waded through the junk.

“Somebody must’ve thought this was a trash can,” Sasha says, pointing to a half-eaten hamburger.

Next to it, I see the book. “There it is!” I scoop it up and kiss it.

Sasha says, “Yuck.”

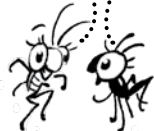
“Yuck,” I echo. There was actually a bit of ketchup stuck on it. “Now we just need to get this back to the library before it closes.” I hold on to the book for dear life.

“We all know how Mrs. Linqvist feels about late books,” says Sasha.

Now that’s a very interesting question. I do know in Chinese, they’re *māma* and *bàba*.



YOU SEE!!!



Moi, I am impressed.



Before we can get on our bikes, a dog runs up and starts licking the book. “It probably thinks it’s a hamburger,” giggles Sasha. The dog pulls on the book with its teeth.

“No! Bad dog. Drop it!” Of course, the dog doesn’t. I lose the tug of war. The dog runs off through the bushes—with my library book. I stand there, defeated. It just never ends!

“After him. Quick!” shouts Sasha. We take off after the dog and my library book (or what will be left of it). Mrs. Linqvist is *not* going to like this. We climb through the bushes, run across the soccer field, and get to the sidewalk.

“Come here, doggie,” Sasha shouts. “Look what I’ve got.” She fishes a bag of bacon-flavored chips out of her backpack and rips it open. She dumps all the chips on the ground.



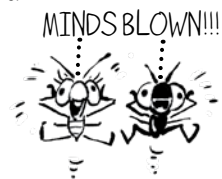
According to this, the Swahili words are also said as *mama* and *baba*.



In Portuguese, mommy and daddy are *mamãe* and *papai*.



In Hebrew, they’re spoken as *ee-ma* and *abba*. That’s pretty close.





“There goes our movie night snack!” I say dramatically. The dog pounces on the chips and drops the book. “Got it!” I shout as I scoop up the book.

“Oh, there you are, Bingo!” A woman with a walker shuffles toward us. “I’m so sorry,” she says. “I just can’t keep up with Bingo the way I used to.”

“It’s OK,” says Sasha. “I’m glad you found each other.”

The woman smiles. “Come on, Bingo baby.” Bingo leaves his bacon-flavored-chips heaven to follow her.

I hug the almost-thrown-away, chewed-on, hamburger-smelling library book. “We’ve got no time to lose! We’ll go back for our bikes later.” We run the rest of the way to the library.

I try to run *into* the library, but the janitor is locking the door.

“Sorry. We’re closing,” she says.

“I only need to return a book,” I say. She looks at me expectantly. “Please!” I plead. The janitor quickly opens the door for me.



Uh... excuse me, Ms. Silverfish. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have done a terrible thing.

The Super Duck book he checked out is seven months late!

Lock him up.

Ouch. Well, that's OK. Thank you for returning it, Bill.



I jog to the counter, happy to be able to return my library book on time. I get to keep my library card!

“Good evening, Mrs. Linqvist,” I say as cheerfully as I can. “How are you?” I smile my broadest smile.

“Terrible.” She doesn’t smile broadly—or at all. I hold out my library book. She snatches it from my hands. She looks at it and sniffs it. She makes a face like she just ate a lemon. She turns the book over. She opens and closes it. She pushes it aside and starts typing on her computer like a woodpecker drilling insects out of a dead tree. “Jackie,” she starts, “your library card is suspended for one month.”

“But . . . but I just returned my library book!” I point to the book on her desk.

“This, Jackie,” she says, holding up the ketchup-smearred, slightly slobbery book, “is a Volkswagen Polo car manual.” She smacks it down on her desk and slides it over to me. She looks me straight in the eyes. “This is not a library book.”

Suddenly, I understand why Dad said my overalls with super-handy oversized pockets were so heavy. 🐜

