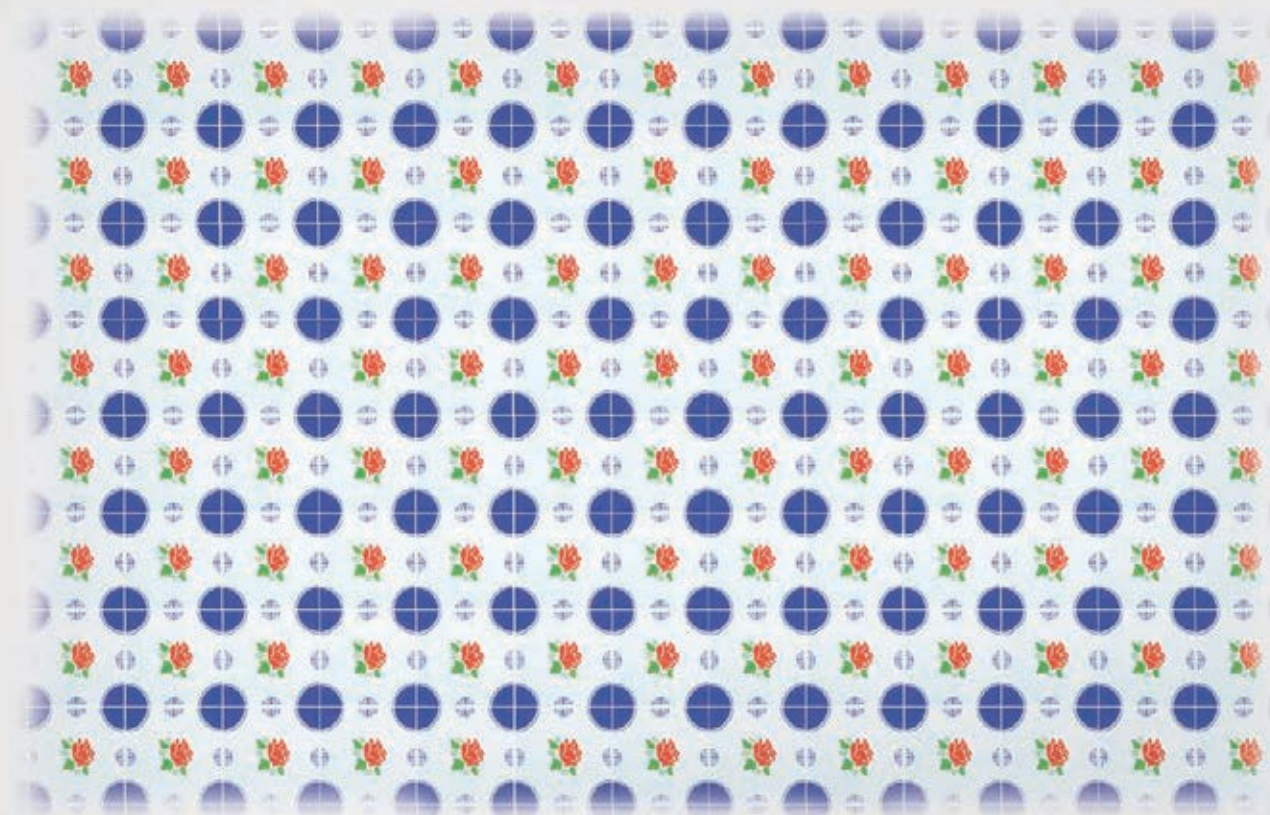


"Is ... Is the house winking at us?" whispered Kim Boon to George.

Accompany three children, Kim Boon, George and Swee Neo, on their adventure in a winking house museum in Joo Chiat and through them, learn more about the Peranakan culture.

What will become of the three children as they learn the secrets of the winking house museum?



CONTACT INFORMATION

Address 11 Teck Whye Walk Singapore 688261
Telephone 67691025
Fax 67635191
Email twps@moe.edu.sg
Website www.teckwhyepri.moe.edu.sg
Facebook www.facebook.com/pages/Teck-Whye-PrimarySchool/764964786851273



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Secrets in the House Museum



TECK WHYE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Secrets in the House Museum

Illustrated by Adeline Tng

This is a story written by children for children.

This book is written by a group of 6 ten-year-old students. While the events and characters in this story are fictitious, these courageous writers have tapped on their learning experiences at a local house museum and worked together to bring you “*Secrets in the House Museum*”.



Supported by



National
Heritage
Board



Celebrating All Things Peranakan

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(Authors)

Harriette ☺

Aditya ☺

Callum ☺

Cheng Yee

Riley (Riley)

Sili



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Secrets in the House Museum

By students of Teck Whye Primary School

Illustrated by Adeline Tng





Kim Boon began rubbing his eyes vigorously as he stood in front of the house. He could not believe what he was seeing. The house looked like it was winking at him!

To Kim Boon, who spent his days proving himself as a budding scientist, a winking house was simply not possible.

"Is ... Is the house winking at us?" whispered Kim Boon to George, one of his best friends.

George, the curious one, who was always game for adventure and detective work, excitedly said, "Winking house? Where? Woah! Looks like a mystery ... shall we find out more?"

"What? Where? I see nothing!" said Swee Neo, who was suspicious of everything around her. In times like these, she wondered why she was friends with these two curious and adventurous boys.



The three children had been friends for a long time. They always had good fun together. The winking house looked like it was full of secrets.

Kim Boon, George and Swee Neo had been excited to be selected for this field trip. It was their first time to Joo Chiat, which was in the eastern part of Singapore. They had walked for hours, keeping their eyes wide open for things related to Peranakan culture until they finally stood in front of this house.



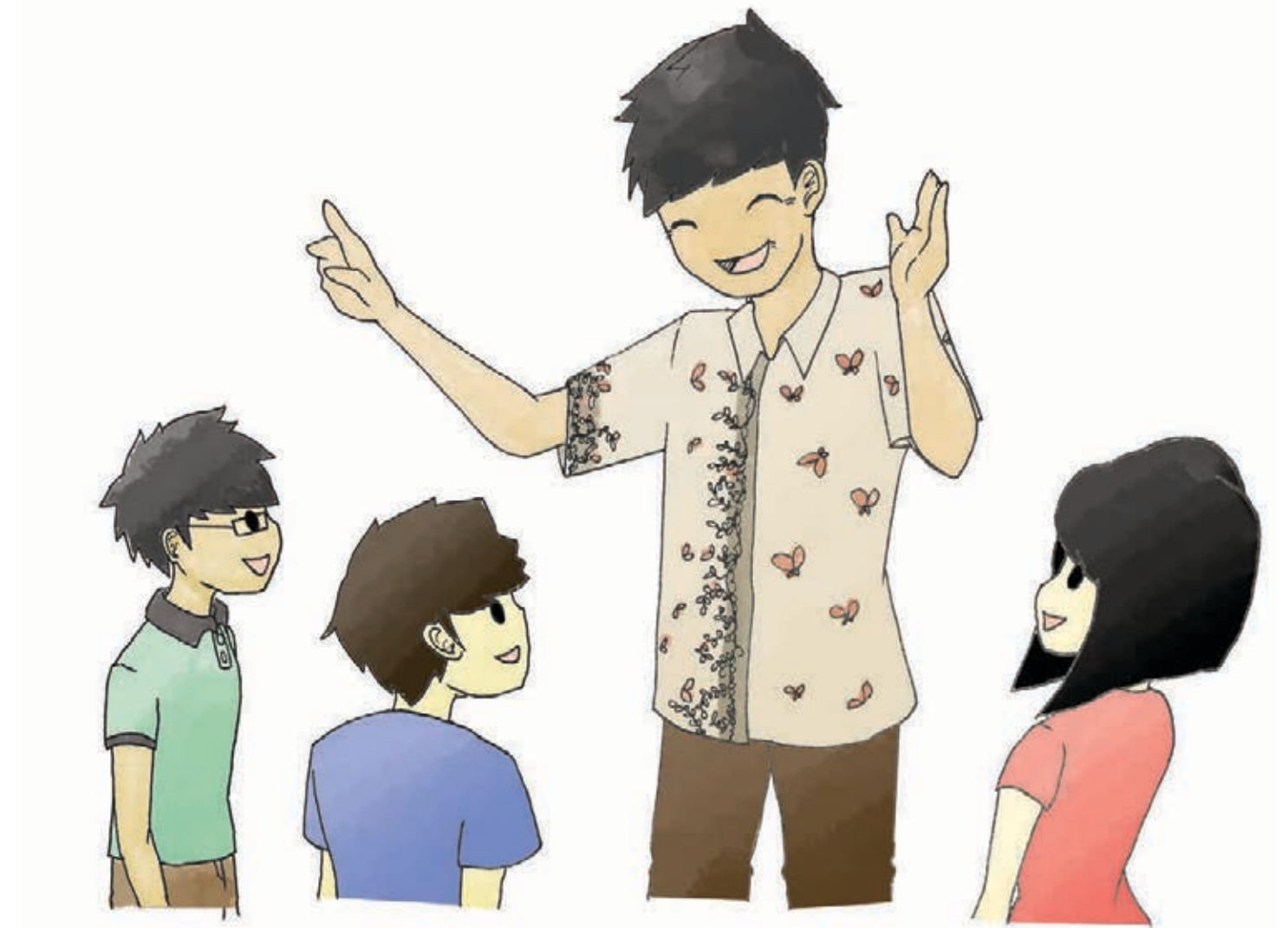
The children walked up to the narrow door, calling out,

"Hello! Anyone there?"

They heard footsteps coming towards the door. Then a man swung open the door, startling them.

"Yes?" came an abrupt greeting.

"We ... we saw your house wink at us!" George blurted out.



The man looked at each of them carefully with a straight face before breaking out in a wide smile.

"I am *Baba Mark*. I am a Peranakan. Peranakans call the men '*Baba*' instead of '*Mr.*'. So call me *Baba Mark*. I am a collector of Peranakan artefacts. This museum is home for my collection and I also live here. So this is my house museum. Welcome to my house museum, my little *kawans*."

Would you like a tour of my ... as you call it ... '*winking house*'?"

Baba Mark was a chatty man. The children had never heard of a house museum before and they certainly had never come across a house that winked.

How could anyone say no?



Baba Mark showed the three friends his house museum.

It was like going on a trip back in time.

The three friends gazed at the colourful *mangkok tengkats*, tiffin-carriers and *kam chengs*, covered containers, which were on display. They walked carefully up the stairs to the second floor, admiring the many spittoons lined neatly along the steps on the way up.

On the second floor, Swee Neo tried on a *sarong kebaya*, a traditional outfit, with a pair of *kasot manek*, beaded slippers, worn by the *Nyonyas* (Peranakan women).

As *Baba Mark* showed them around, he told many stories about the artefacts and how they came to be part of his collection. He was very knowledgeable in Peranakan culture and the three friends listened intently.



“What’s in that room?” asked George who noticed that *Baba Mark* had brought them all around the house museum except for one room.

The room was hidden away behind a piece of unusual *batik selendang* or baby carrier, near the back of the house museum.

Baba Mark did not reply.

As the children sat down on the Mother-of-Pearl furniture for tea, George asked again, “What’s in that room?”



“Which room, *sayang*?”

“The hidden room at the back, next to the kitchen.”

Baba Mark remained silent. But George persisted. Eventually, *Baba Mark* said, “Oh ... nothing, *sayang*. Not hidden. It is just a storage room. You know, to keep *barang barang*. That is why I did not show it to you. Come, *sayang*. Shall I play you some Peranakan songs like *Rasa Sayang* and *Chan Mali Chan* on my piano?”



"Just *barang barang*? How can that be?"
George wondered.

It seemed like *Baba Mark* was hiding something. George whispered to Kim Boon, "That man might be hiding something from us. If there are secrets in this house museum, I'm going to find out!"

George tried to discover more about the storage room but *Baba Mark* avoided his questions.

Just then, they were startled by a loud stamping noise! The stamping seemed to be coming from the mysterious storage room.

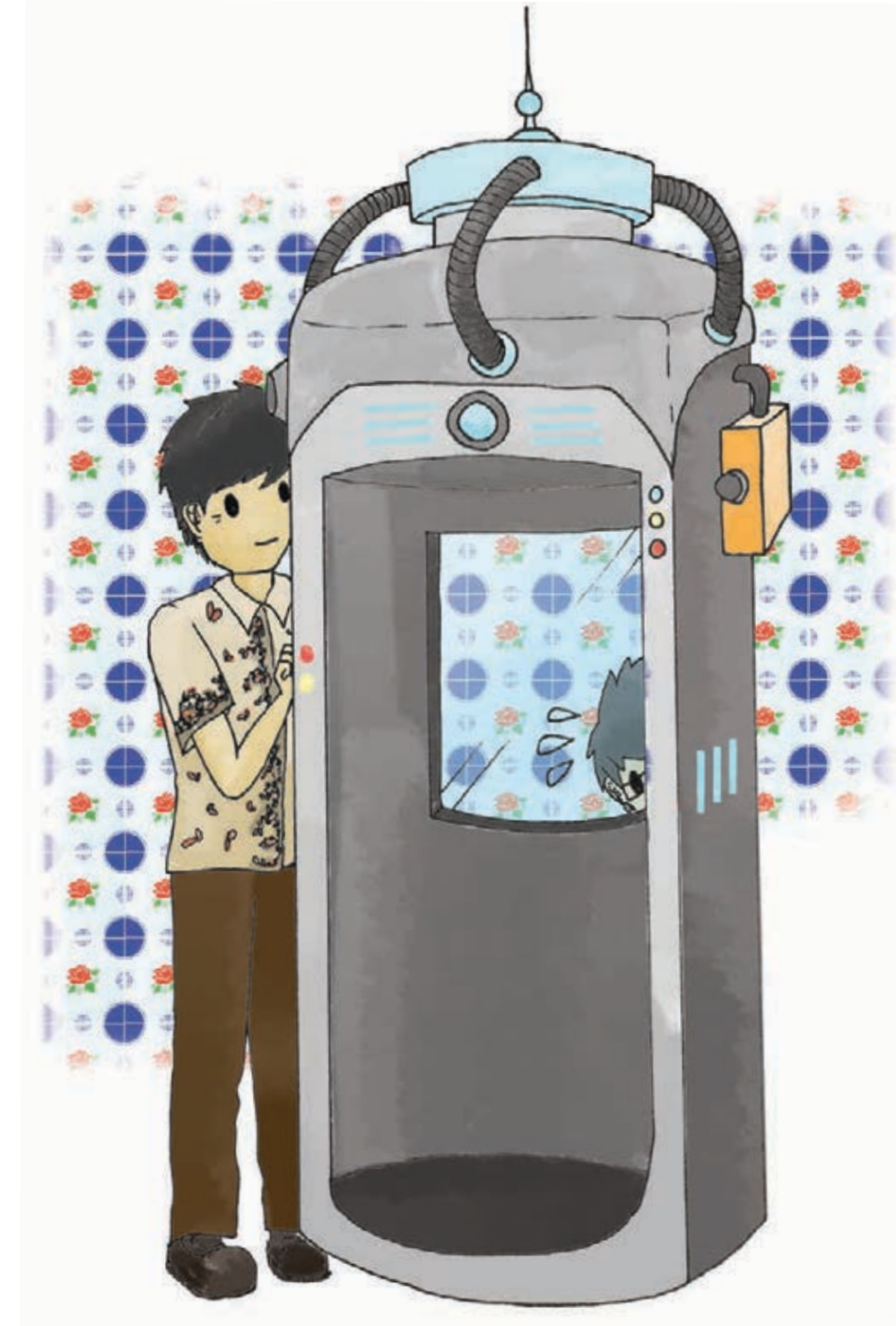
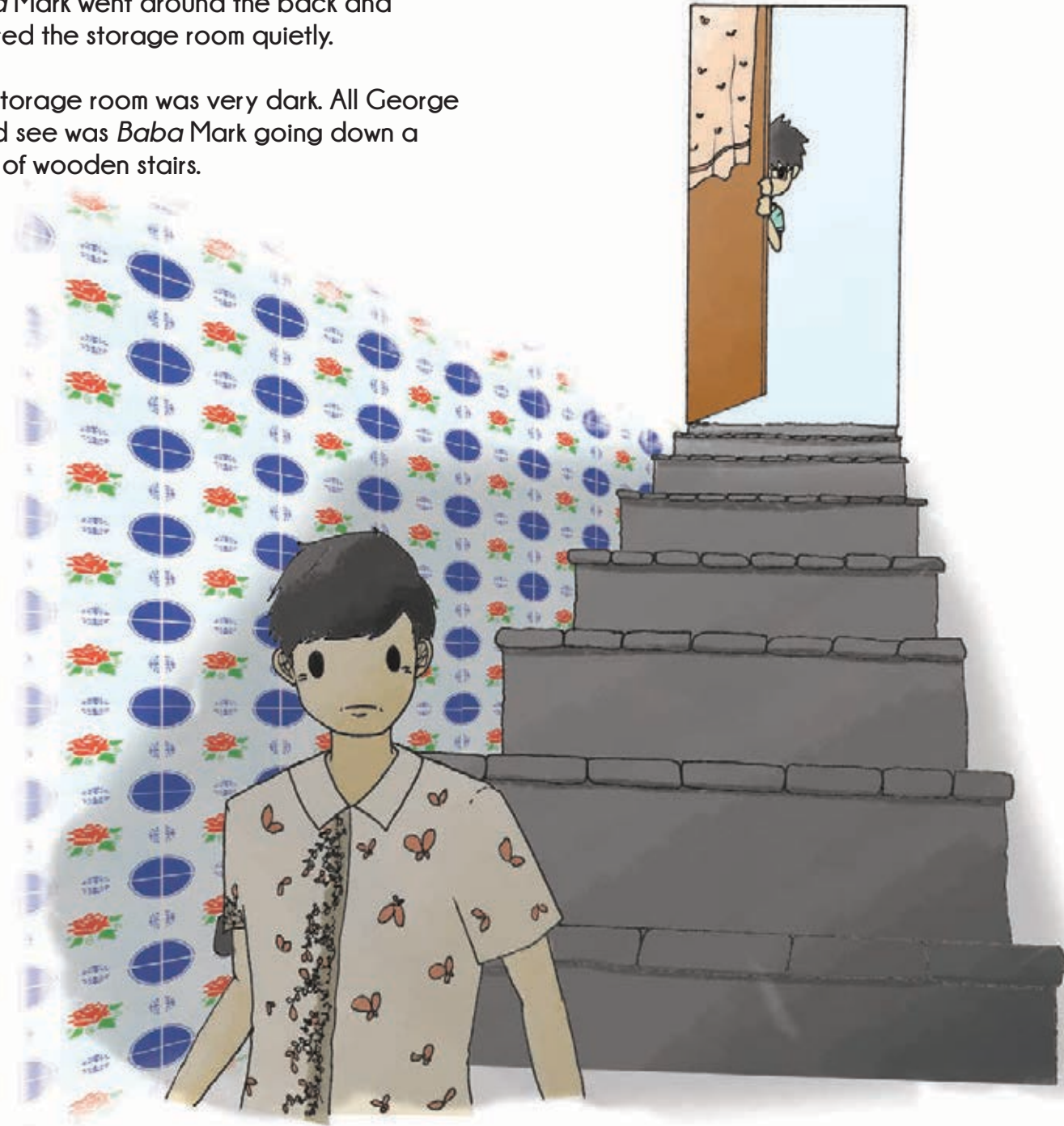


The noise was so loud that *Baba Mark* could no longer pretend nothing was going on. So he made an excuse and left the friends.

George suspected *Baba Mark* was going to do something about the strange loud noise. George followed him.

Baba Mark went around the back and entered the storage room quietly.

The storage room was very dark. All George could see was *Baba* Mark going down a flight of wooden stairs.

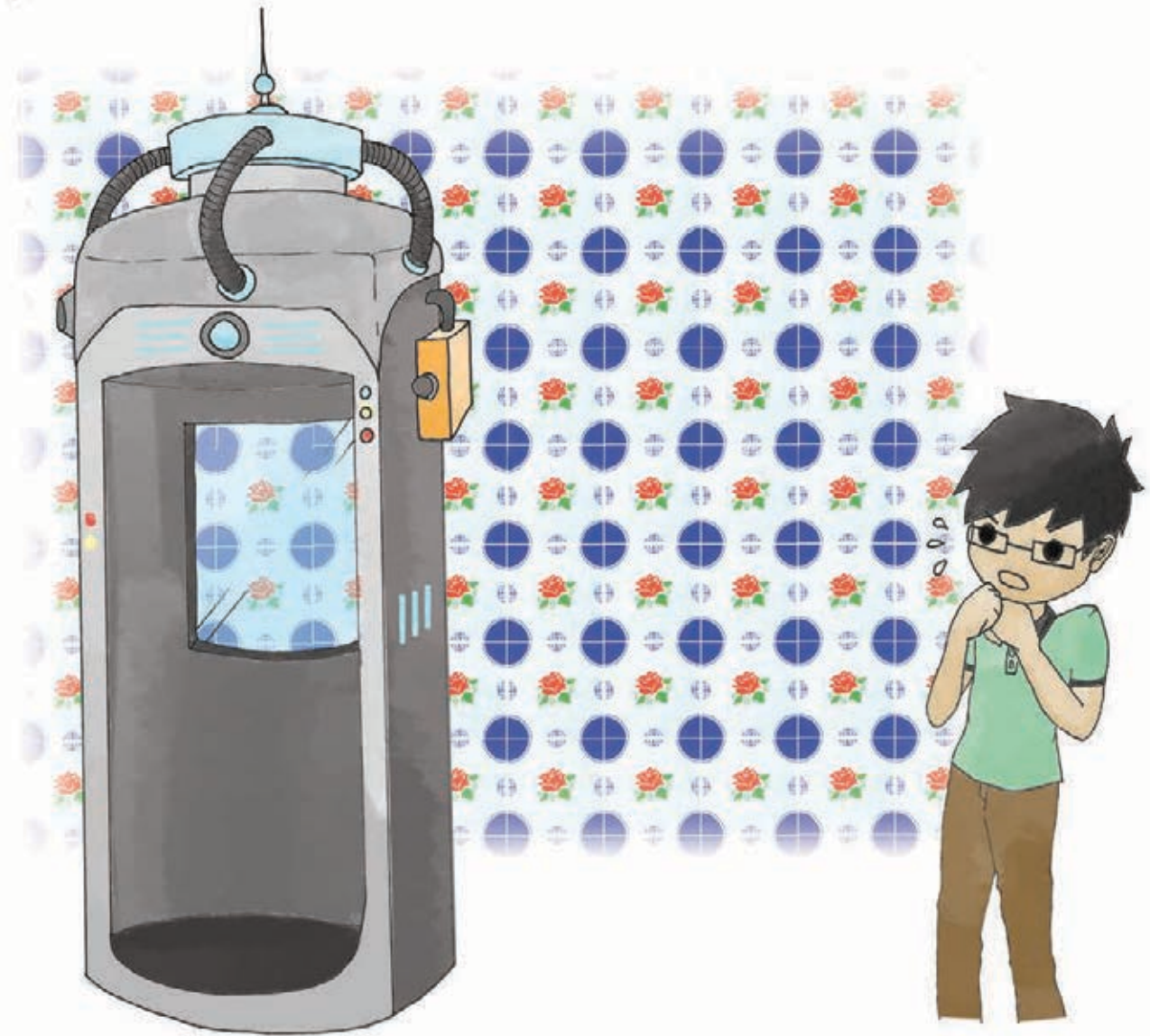


George followed *Baba* Mark down the wooden stairs as closely and quietly as he could. It was difficult trying to remain hidden from *Baba* Mark. The stamping noise got louder.

After reaching the bottom of the stairs, George saw *Baba* Mark flick on a switch twice.

Seconds later, bright flashing lights appeared. The stamping noise got more furious.

The flashing lights started to whirl, flashing brighter and brighter and circling faster and faster till the whole room looked like a bright huge ball of light.



Everything looked so unbelievable! George felt the urge to leave the storage room.

Alas! The wooden stairs creaked noisily, as though annoyed with George for discovering the secret of the house museum!

George turned around to look at *Baba Mark*, wondering if *Baba Mark* had heard him. He found *Baba Mark* looking at him intently.

Baba Mark seemed like he wanted to run after George, but it was too late. A split second later, *Baba Mark* disappeared!

George was still in shock as he rushed back to his two friends.

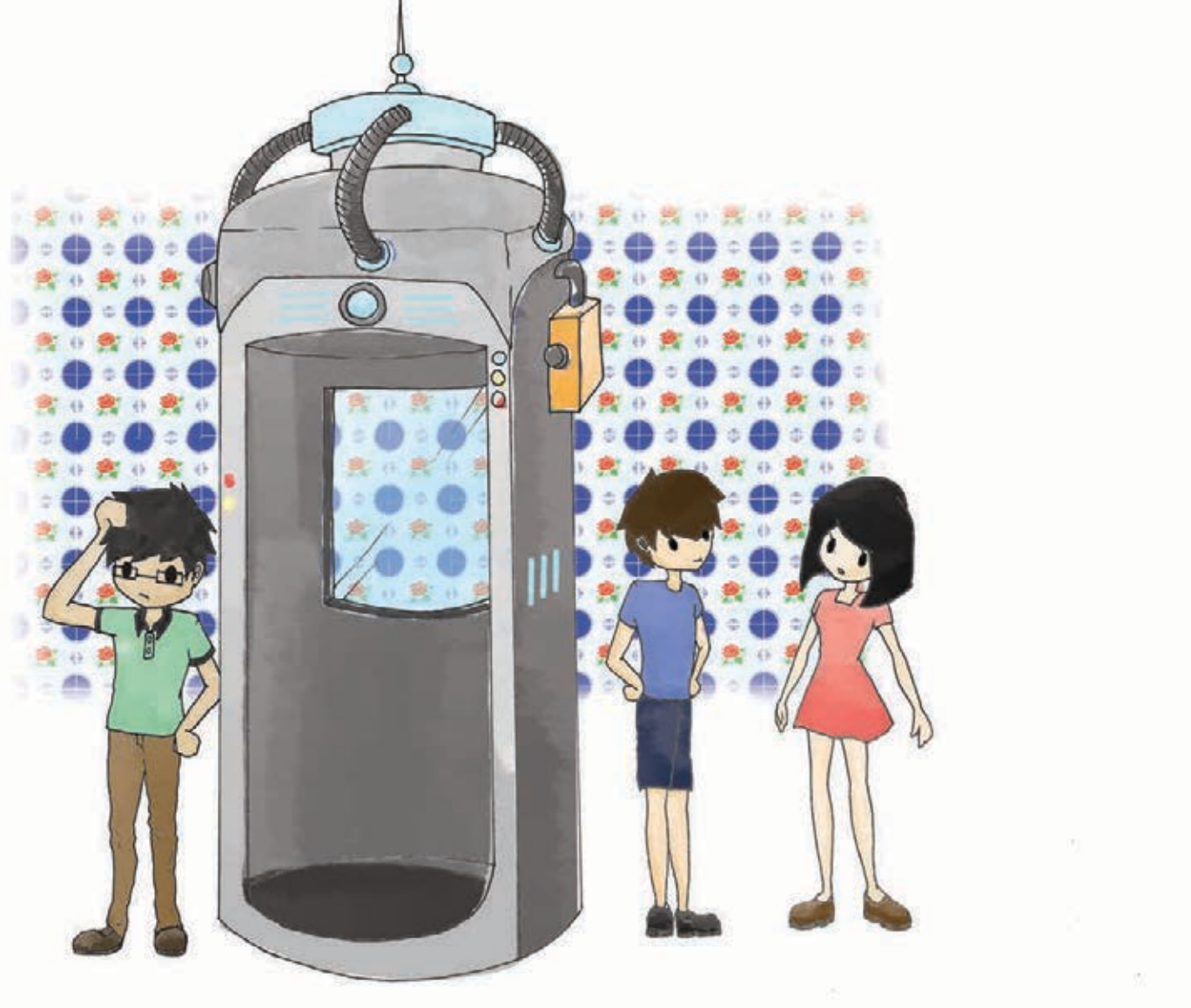
It was hard to make out what George was saying. "Lights ... *Baba Mark* ... disappeared ..."

It took a few minutes and many repetitions from George for the two friends to understand him.

"So you are saying *Baba Mark* switched on something, stood there and then disappeared?" Swee Neo asked.

"There were bright lights! Flashing lights in a circle!" George went on, while dragging Swee Neo and Kim Boon to the storage room.





The children stood in the dark empty storage room, trying to picture what George had said.

"Okay ... So where is *Baba Mark* now?" asked Swee Neo.

"I don't know. We should follow him. So we can find out where he is and what he is up to," George replied.

Staring into the dark space where the lights once flashed, Kim Boon said, "I think my best guess is that this is a teleporter. It works like a secret doorway."

The children decided that the only way to find out what secrets the house museum held was to repeat what *Baba Mark* did.

"Flick this switch twice and ..."

Like before, bright lights started flashing and the loud stamping noise began.

George said, "I think we should not let *Baba Mark* know that we have learnt how to start this teleporter of his."

Swee Neo added, "I agree. I don't know what *Baba Mark* might do to us if he found out that we know about this secret. He could lock us up in this room forever!"





George took a step towards the bright blinking teleporter. "Should we ... can we ... well, shall we then go into the teleporter?"

"Are you sure?" asked Kim Boon.

"Are you mad?" Swee Neo retorted.

"At least we can be prepared for what that man is planning; be it good or bad," George tried to reason.

"I hope you know what you are doing," Swee Neo said, sounding unsure.

George said, "Let's just go. It is the only way we can find out where *Baba Mark* is. Who knows? Maybe he needs our help!"

The children jumped into the teleporter.

It took just a few seconds, but it felt like hours to them.

The flashing lights and loud noise suddenly stopped.

When they stepped out of the teleporter, they walked up the familiar flight of stairs and past the door of the storage room. They saw spittoons, *mangkok tengkats* and *kam chengs* just like what they had seen in *Baba Mark's* house museum except they looked newer.

George looked around and saw a wooden screen in front of him. Hearing laughter, the three friends peeked through the carvings of the wooden screen.

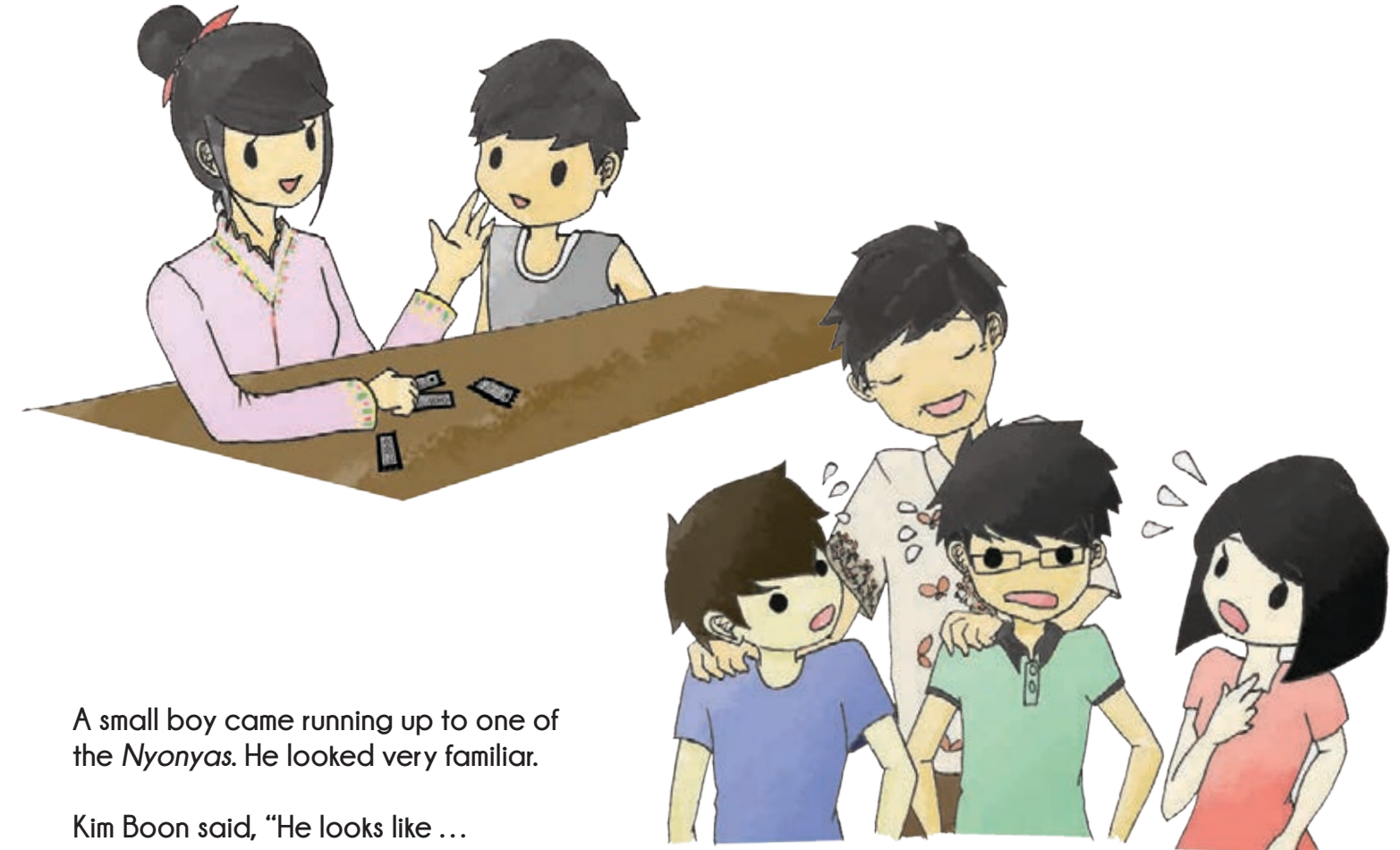




To their surprise, they saw *Nyonyas* dressed in *sarong kebayas* playing cards! The children recognised the cards as *Cherki* cards. Not too long ago on that very afternoon, *Baba Mark* had been teaching them how the designs could be divided into three suits numbering one to nine and how to play that very same game.

At that moment, however, it felt odd to be in the same place but what appeared to be a different time!

"I think ... I think we are in the past ... we have gone back in time!" exclaimed Kim Boon, scratching his head. "This winking house really used to be a home to a Peranakan family!"



A small boy came running up to one of the *Nyonyas*. He looked very familiar.

Kim Boon said, "He looks like ... no ... it can't be ..."

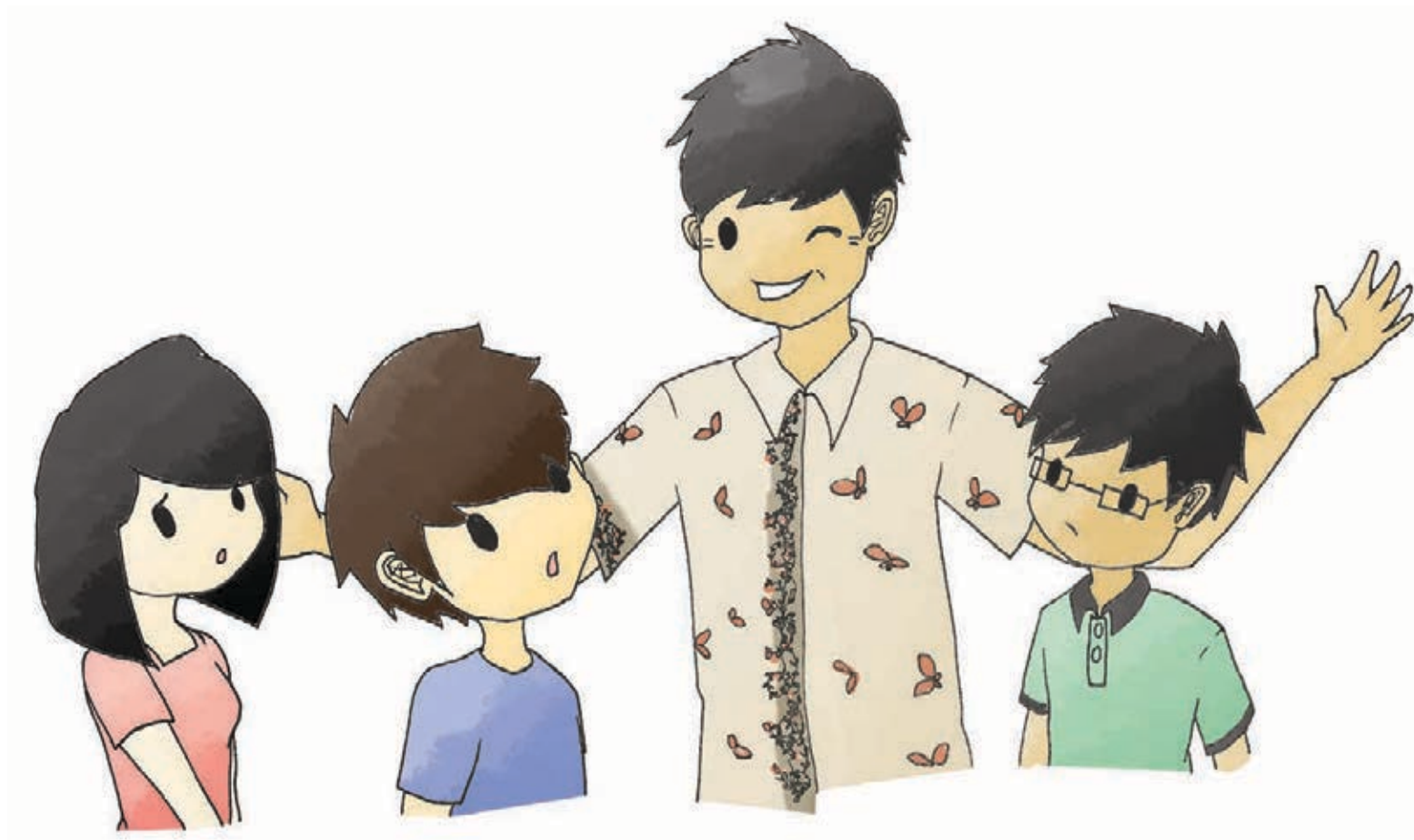
The *Nyonya* looked fondly at the small boy and said, "Come Mark, have you learnt the *Pantun* I asked you to? Remember what *Mak* always tells you? You must ensure our Peranakan culture and legacy live on."

Suddenly the children felt a tap on their shoulders.

An adult male voice said, "Children, you have seen enough. You need to go home now. Come, children. *Mari pulang!* Now!"

Swee Neo immediately recognised the voice as that of *Baba Mark's*!

He made sure the three children knew they had to leave immediately.



Without another word, *Baba Mark* took them back into the storage room.

As they were about to enter the teleporter, *Baba Mark* looked at them and said, "I often come here to relive the past and learn more about my roots. It is very impolite of you to come here without my permission. Now you must not tell anybody about my secret, okay?"

And the owner of the house winked at them, just as the house had done.

Then the loud stamping noise began. Bright lights flashed, bright lights stopped.

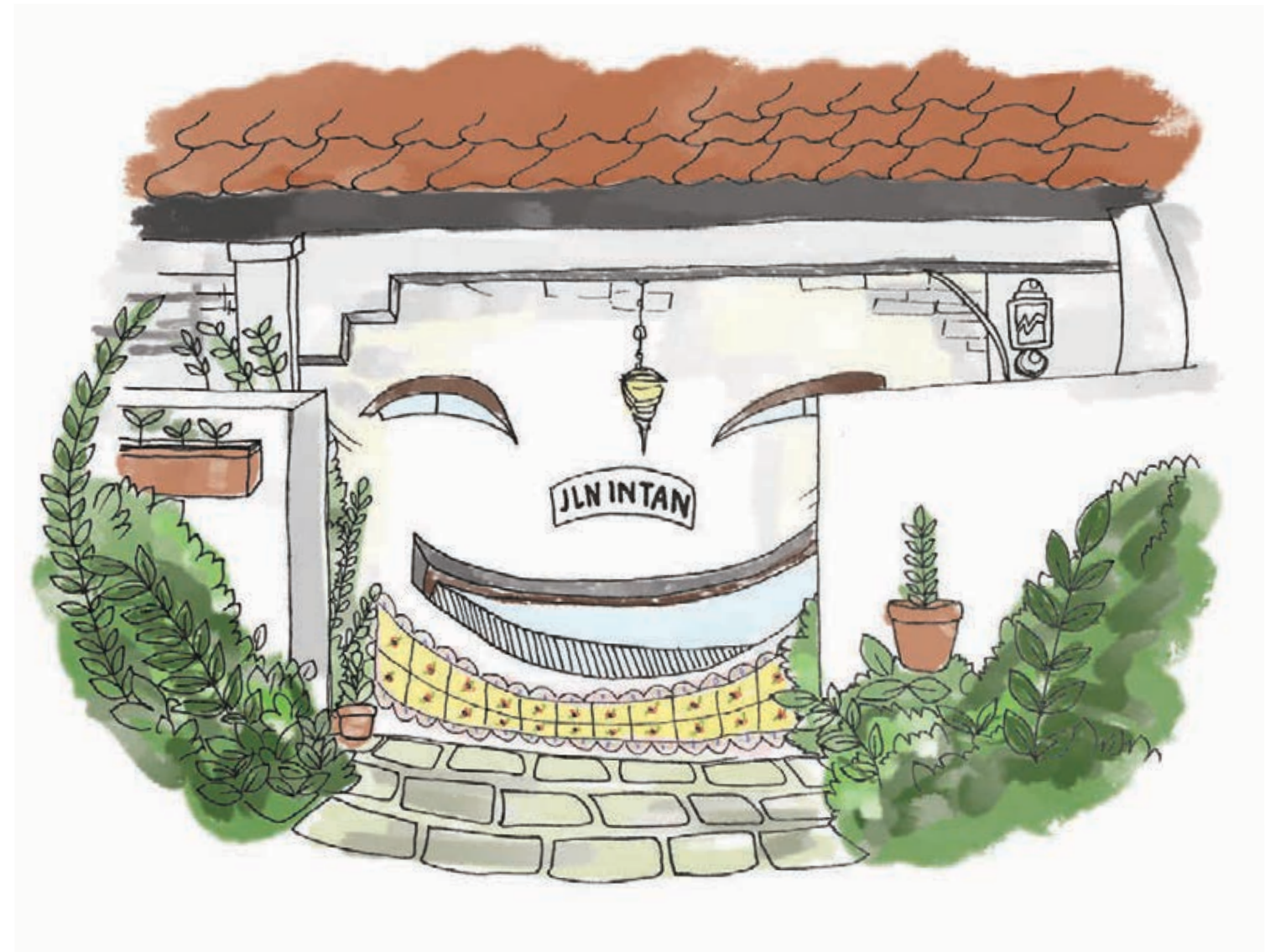
Not long after, the children bade farewell to *Baba Mark* and left the house museum.

Just before they turned a street corner, they took another look at the house museum.

This time they saw it snigger!

The friends looked at one another in shock.

"Is the house sniggering at us? What other secrets are there in this house museum?" wondered George aloud.



Interesting Facts/Glossary

Word	Meaning
Baba	Descriptive name applied specifically to male local-born Chinese of mixed Chinese-Malay-Indian descent belonging to the Baba Peranakan community
Batik selendang	Shawl, made of batik material, worn loosely over the head or across the shoulder by Malay women
Barang barang	Stuff; wares
Cherki card game	Nyonya card game
Kam cheng	Jar with cover
Kasot Manek	Beaded slippers of the Baba community
Kawans	Friends
Mangkok tengkat	Tiffin carrier
Mari pulang	Come; to return
Pantun	Poetry, four-line verse
Sarong kebaya	Nyonya long sleeve blouse worn with a sarong
Sayang	Love; affection

Reference: "A Baba Malay Dictionary: The First Comprehensive Compendium of Straits Chinese Terms and Expressions" by William Gwee Thian Hock. Published in conjunction with The Peranakan Association of Singapore, 2006

Also available:

