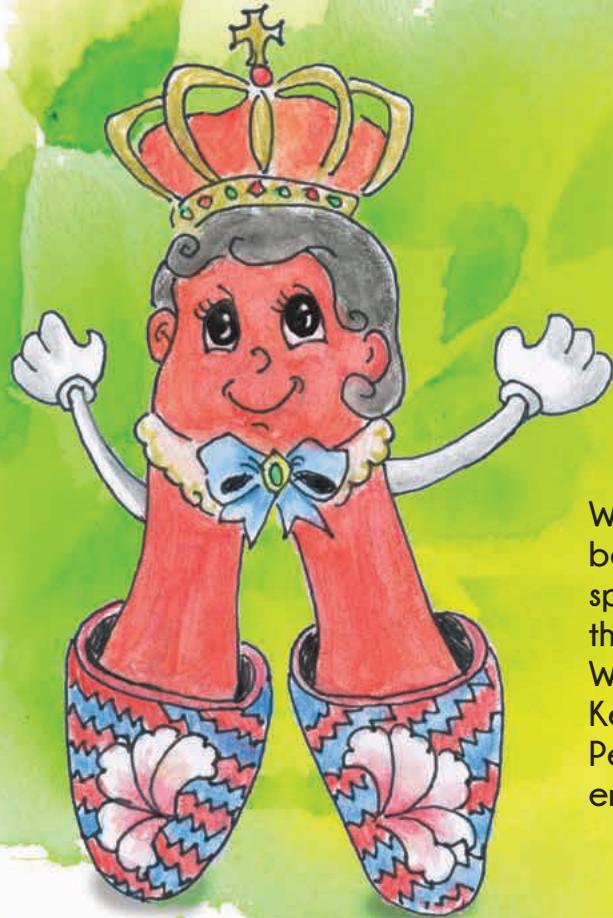


"Choo and Cheng are hurt! This time, we must take revenge!"

"Fine! To battle we go!"



What will the outcome of this battle between the teapots and spittoons be? What lessons will the Peranakan artefacts learn? What surprises await them? Join Keng, the teapot, in his visit to the Peranakan house museum and his encounter with the spittoons.

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TECK WHYE PRIMARY SCHOOL

# The Battle in the Peranakan House Museum

Illustrated by Joshua Chew



The Battle in the Peranakan House Museum

This is a story written by children for children.

This book is written by a group of 7 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 "The Battle in the Peranakan House Museum".



Supported by



National  
Heritage  
Board



Celebrating All Things Peranakan

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## The Battle in the Peranakan House Museum

By students of Teck Whye Primary School

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## Brief Tips on Peranakan Culture

Do you know where Peranakan porcelain comes from? It was traditionally made in a Chinese town called Jingdezhen but the designs and colours on the teapots and plates were chosen to suit the preference of the Peranakan community. Some of the specially-ordered pieces even have European influence.



Peranakans also specially ordered enamel ware from Eastern Europe, namely the Czech Republic and Poland. For example, beautiful tiffin carriers and spittoons were made exclusively for the Peranakan community. Some even bore Baba Malay words on them like *Selamat Makan* and *Selamat Utong*, meaning happy eating and happy working.

Peranakans are known for the beautiful beadwork on their slippers and needlework on their kebayas. The Peranakan women, Nyonyas, would showcase their skills by wearing the handiwork that they had made.

## Hello,

I am Keng. I am a Peranakan teapot.

I was specially ordered and made in Jingdezhen, a town in China, by a rich Chinese man. Life was boring until he took me back to Singapore where I lived in a big house with him. Not too far from where I lived was a unique Peranakan house museum. Many teapots and other Peranakan artefacts lived in that house museum. Sometimes, I would sneak over at night. There was always something happening at the house museum... so much to see and do.

Would you like me to share a story with you about a battle that took place in this house museum not too long ago? All right, I will.



It was a quiet evening and I was just about to rest when I was told a teapot in the house museum, named Cheng, was broken. Cheng was my friend. I had to go and find out what had happened.



The house museum was owned by a Peranakan man who loved Peranakan culture so much that he collected Peranakan things and displayed them in his home. His home became known as the Peranakan house museum. The house museum had even won the Museum Roundtable Best Overall Experience Award in 2011. People from all over the world came to view his collection and learn about Peranakan culture.

I knocked on the *pintu pagar*,  
the swing door of the house museum.

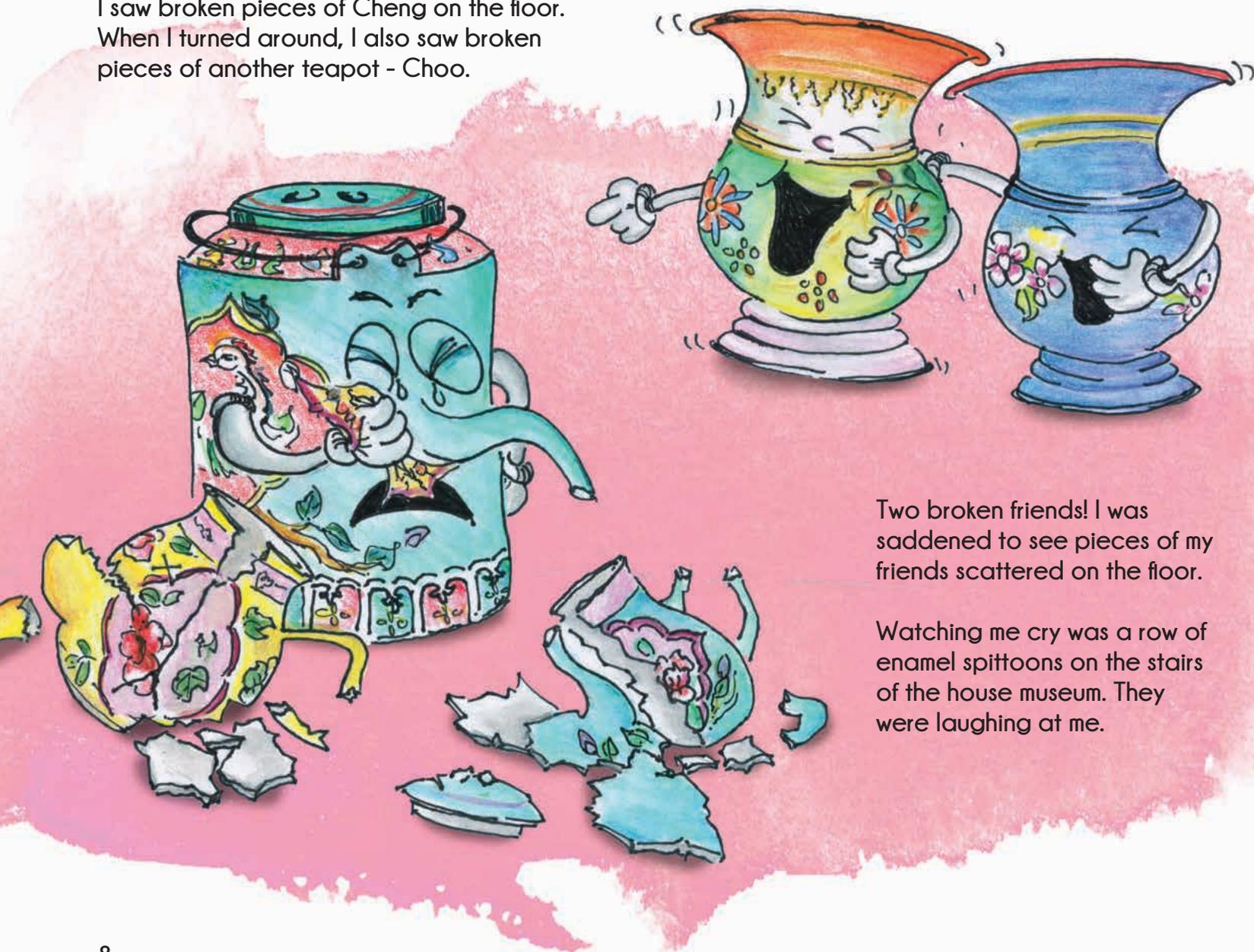
**“Tap! Tap! Tap!”**

I knocked carefully. Being made of  
porcelain, I knew I could break easily.



A pair of beaded slippers, also called *kasok manek*, greeted me. It told me that the owner was not home that night.

The minute I stepped into the house museum, I saw broken pieces of Cheng on the floor. When I turned around, I also saw broken pieces of another teapot - Choo.



Two broken friends! I was saddened to see pieces of my friends scattered on the floor.

Watching me cry was a row of enamel spittoons on the stairs of the house museum. They were laughing at me.

The loudest laughs came from Charles, the Spittoon Chief.

I did not like Charles. You could say we were enemies. I felt an uncontrollable anger rise inside me.



"Hey, stop that!" I burst out.

"You stop! There is nothing to cry about!" said Charles.

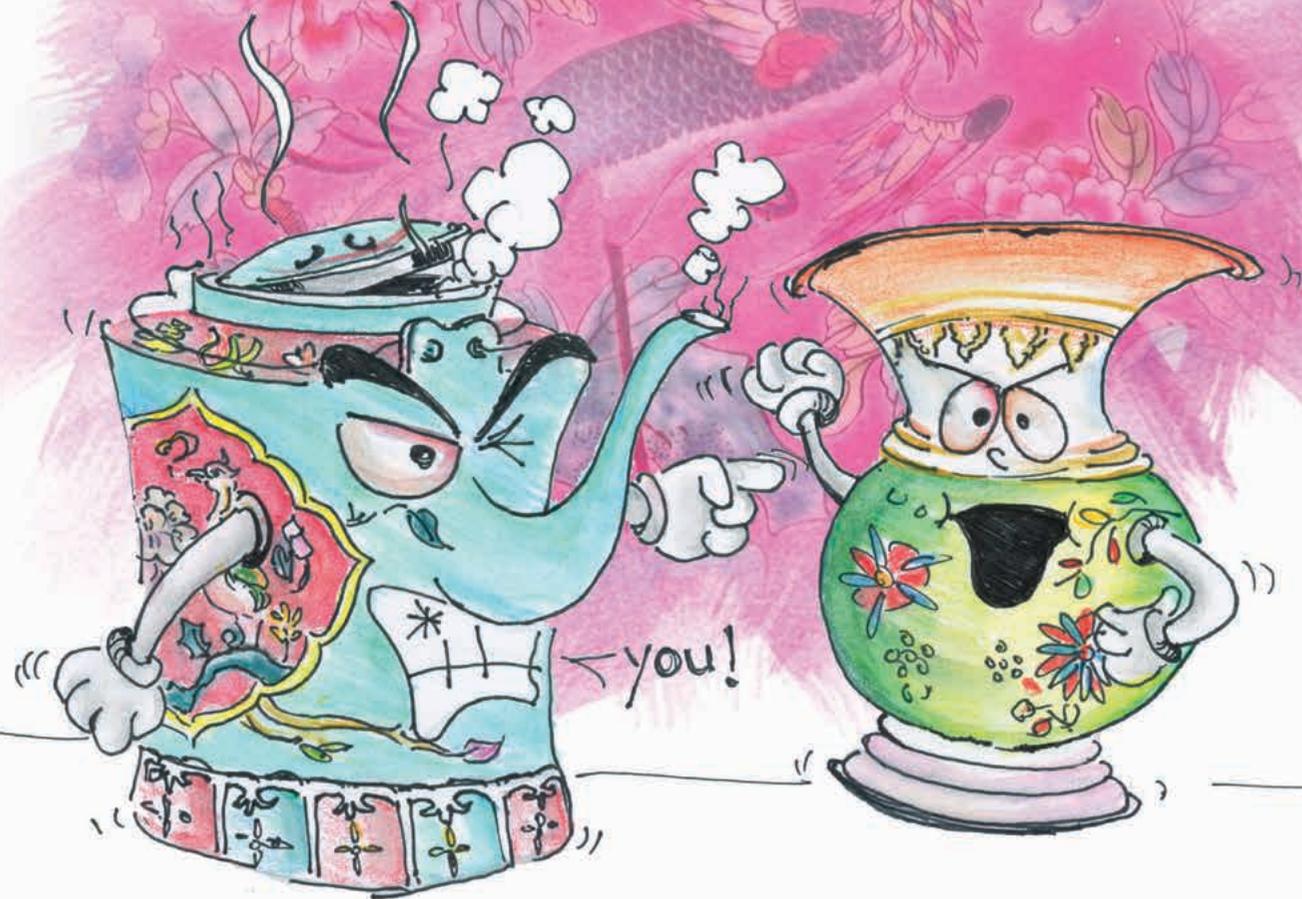
The laughing became louder.

I became angrier. The more I thought about Choo and Cheng, the angrier I became.

Finally, I erupted.

"How dare you hurt my friends?" I exclaimed.

"Hurt your friends? Says who? No, we did not!" Charles shouted.



Other teapots in the house museum started to gather around me.

"Yes, you did! Who else would want to hurt them?" I shouted back.

"You teapots! Always saying things that are not true!"

"You spittoons! Remember you are made for spit!"

"So? You are just a teapot! What's so great about being filled with hot tea?"

The shouting and name-calling continued.

Queen Slippy, the leader of the beaded slippers, came down from her shelf on the upper floor.

She saw the horrible scene and sighed. "Enough! *Sudah!* Please, stop!" she pleaded.

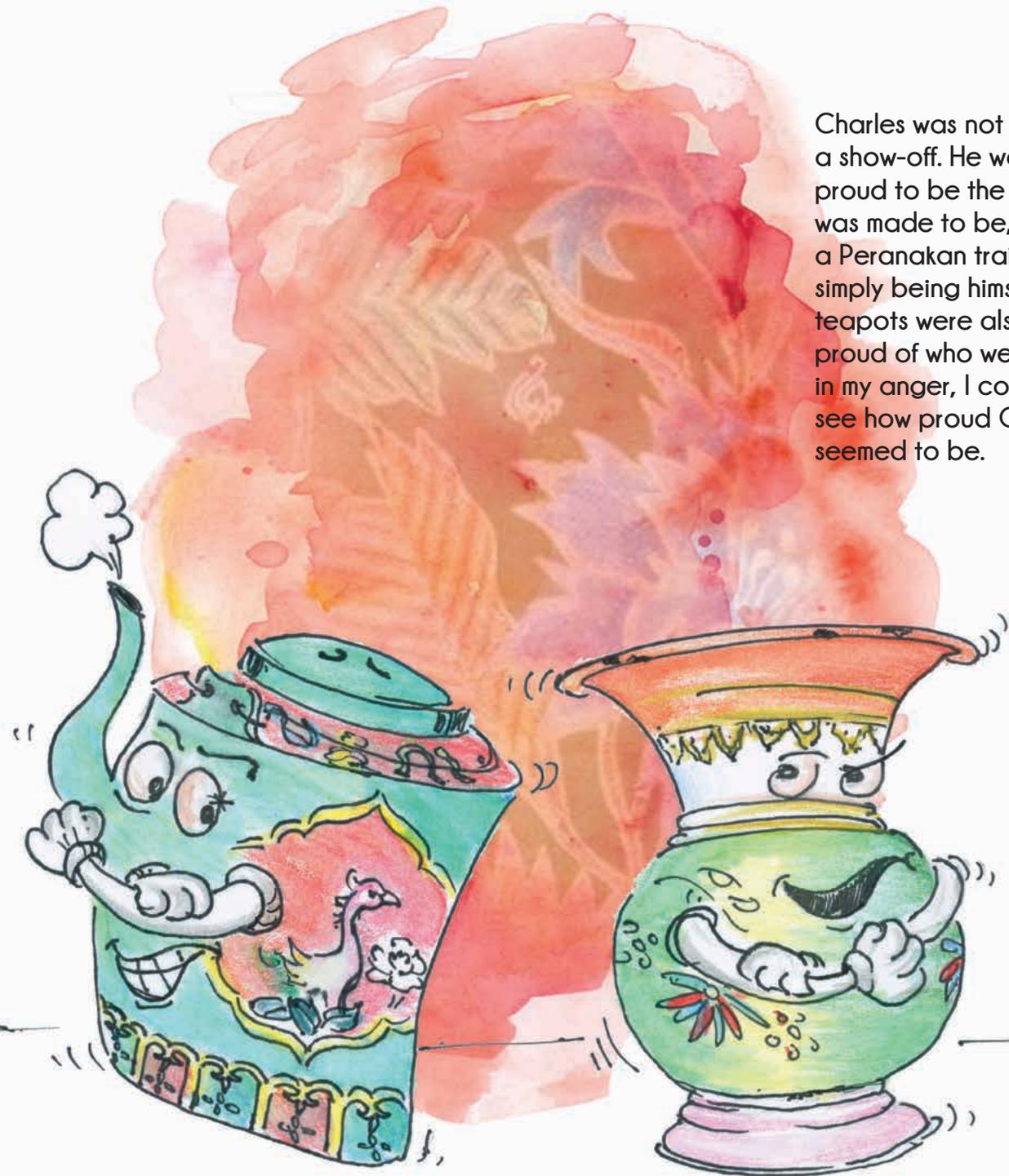
No one listened.

"Choo and Cheng are hurt! This time, we must take revenge!" I cried.

"Fine! To battle we go! You porcelains break so easily. Easy to *pecah!* We enamels are of the best European quality. We will surely win!" shouted the spittoons with glee.



Charles was not really a show-off. He was just proud to be the best he was made to be, which is a Peranakan trait. He was simply being himself. We teapots were also very proud of who we were. But in my anger, I could only see how proud Charles seemed to be.



That very night, we started planning our attack.

“Let’s strike from a distance! We can use the forks on display!” I suggested.

Meanwhile, the spittoons were planning their attack too. “We can use betel nuts and ask our friend *Kacip*, the betel nut cutter, for help! We can use enamel trays as our shields!” They rushed to gather their weapons.



“*Alamak*, Chief! We have run out of betel nuts!” cried a spittoon.

“What? So fast?” Charles responded.

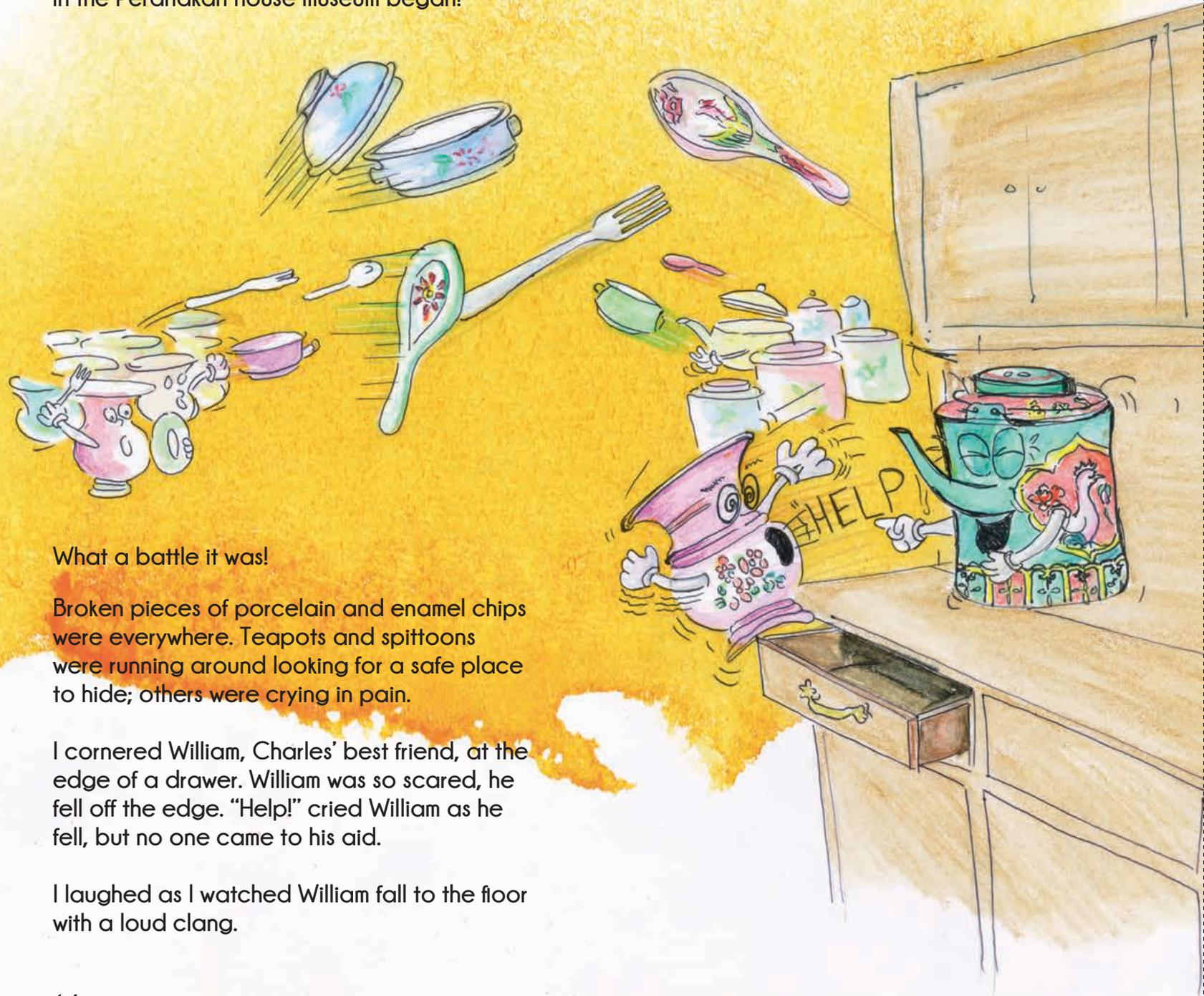
Another spittoon cried out, “The spoons are running away as they are friends with the teapots! Strangely, the silver forks have disappeared too!”

Charles was worried. “*Kus semangat!* Oh dear! What do we do now?”

“Wait! We can toss the tiffin carriers as a counter attack!” cried another spittoon.

Both the spittoons and teapots rushed around in preparation for the battle.

Soon, the battle horn sounded! The battle in the Peranakan house museum began!



What a battle it was!

Broken pieces of porcelain and enamel chips were everywhere. Teapots and spittoons were running around looking for a safe place to hide; others were crying in pain.

I cornered William, Charles' best friend, at the edge of a drawer. William was so scared, he fell off the edge. "Help!" cried William as he fell, but no one came to his aid.

I laughed as I watched William fall to the floor with a loud clang.



Queen Slippy called out, "Stop! It is almost daylight! Our owner will be arriving soon!"

**"Stop!"** she continued.

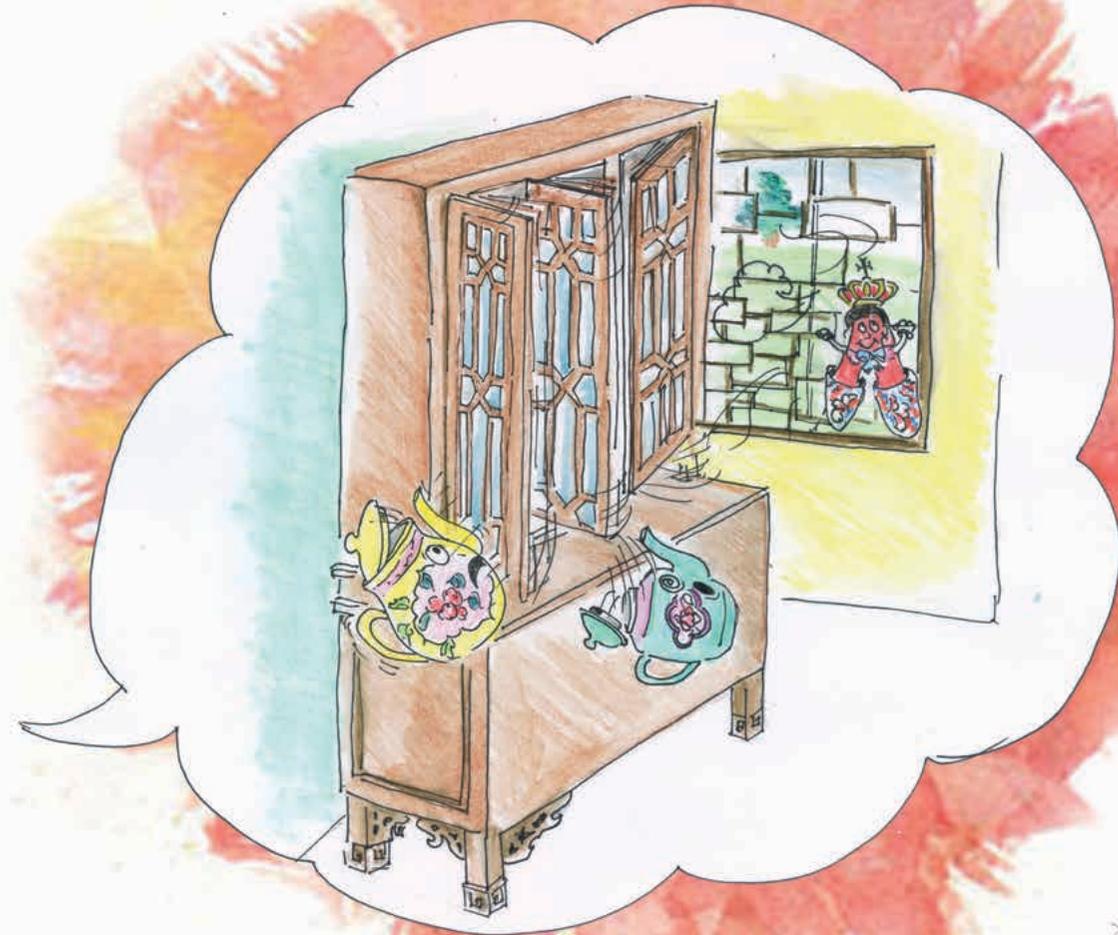
"Why should we?" snapped Charles.



"Choo and Cheng were not hurt intentionally!" Queen Slippy cried out.

**"Prove it!"**

I challenged her.



21

Queen Slippy stood up.

"I saw the whole incident. The windows were open and the winds were so strong that the cabinet doors kept flapping. Choo and Cheng were too close to the edge of the table. A strong gust of wind caused the cabinet doors to knock them over. I ... I could have closed that window. But I do love it when the wind blows in. It is so nice to enjoy the wind for a change. I didn't think ...," Queen Slippy started sobbing.

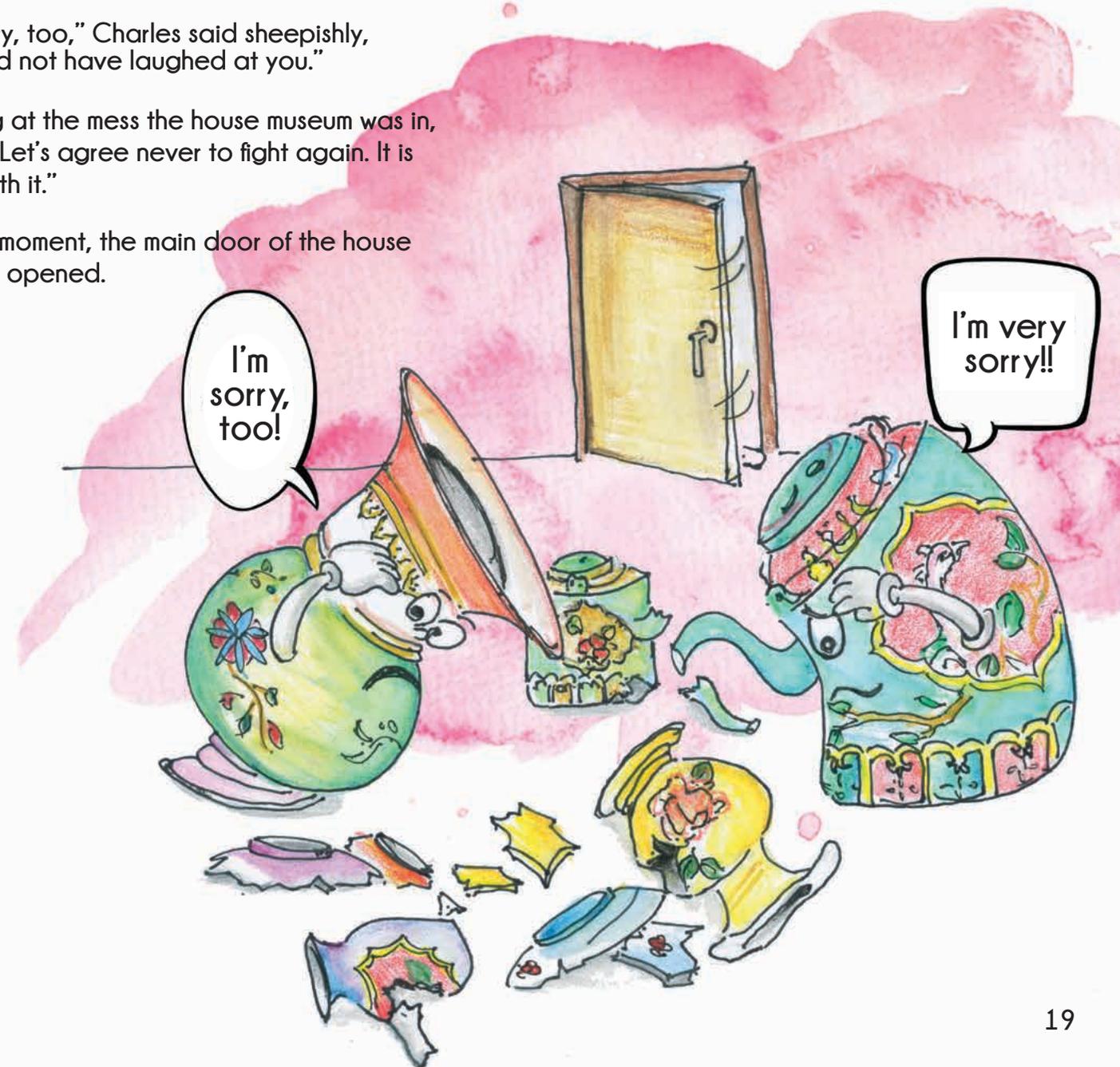
Everyone stared in shock.

Finally, I spoke up. "I am ashamed of myself. I could have asked what really had happened instead of accusing Charles."

"I'm sorry, too," Charles said sheepishly, "I should not have laughed at you."

Looking at the mess the house museum was in, I said, "Let's agree never to fight again. It is not worth it."

At that moment, the main door of the house museum opened.





The owner walked in and exclaimed, "Alamak! What has happened to my house? Why is everything *terbalek*? Why is there such a mess?" He picked William up, fingering the chipped spittoon gently.

It took the museum owner a long time to clean up the mess and repair all the broken pieces. Some could not be repaired and the owner had to leave them as they were - with chips and cracks.

The spittoons and teapots felt guilty when they saw how hard their owner had to work to put the house museum back in order.

From that day, the porcelains and enamels no longer fought.

I realised that we look different and have different roles, but we all want to be our best in our house museum so that many can come and better appreciate the Peranakan culture that we represent.



# Interesting Facts/Glossary



## Butterfly

Symbol of joy, beauty, romance and dreams.



## Chrysanthemum

Signifies a life of ease, longevity and joy.



## Phoenix

Symbol of the sun, the summer harvest and fertility & also a symbol for the empress.



## Lotus

Symbol of purity.



## Peony

Known as the flower of riches and honour & symbolises romance and prosperity.



## Wasp

Symbol for plentiful.

Word	Meaning
Alamak	Exclamation of surprise
Enamel	A type of glass protective coating over metal
Kacip	Betel nut cutter
Kasok manek	Beaded slippers of the Baba community
Kus semangat	An expression of surprise or mild shock such as Good heavens! or Dear me!
Pecah	To break
Peranakan	Popular reference to members of the Baba community
Pintu pagar	Screen door fronting the main door of a house
Sudah	Enough
Terbalek	Upside down; Topsy-turvy

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.

# Peranakan House Museums in Singapore

A house museum is a house that has been converted into a museum. The furniture and artefacts presented may or may not be in their original location or in use in the home. Reference: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic\\_house\\_museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historic_house_museum)

## The Intan - A Hidden Jewel in the Heart of Joo Chiat



Founded in 2003, The Intan is a Peranakan heritage house museum located in the heart of Joo Chiat, a traditional Peranakan enclave in Singapore. It is also the home of its owner, Baba Alvin Yapp. It has an amazing collection of Peranakan artefacts: furniture, porcelain ware, everyday items, clothing and homeware exhibited without ropes or glass barriers. The Intan offers personalised tours which end with authentic Peranakan tea sessions and dinners. It is personally hosted by Baba Alvin Yapp who is ever so keen to share his knowledge and anecdotes on the culture. The Intan also doubles up as a unique event space, having hosted a variety of activities such as jewellery exhibitions, art shows and violin recitals.

[www.the-intan.com](http://www.the-intan.com)  
(Appointments are necessary.)

## NUS Baba House - A Glimpse of the Life of a Wealthy Peranakan Family



Located at 157 Neil Road, Singapore, the NUS Baba House has been preserved and managed by the National University of Singapore for the appreciation of, reflection about and research into Straits Chinese history and culture. 40% of the artefacts exhibited on three levels of the house are associated with the life of the family which originally lived in the house.

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/cfa.museum.about.php>  
(Advance booking needed.)

Also available:

