The Hummingbird Garden

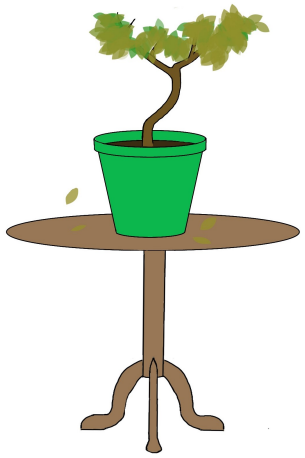
Story by Stuart Baum
Illustrations by Gryffon

Malik sighed a heavy sigh.

His teacher had assigned him homework: finishing a story that was already half written. The teacher gave everyone two stories, both of which were half written, and the children had to finish one of them.

The first story was about two trees in the woods talking to each other. It was simply too dull for words.

A thin raspy voice near him, said, "Interesting way to put it."



Malik looked around his room. Not much to look at. A bed. A bureau with the drawers open and clothes hanging out. A bookshelf with toys and books and other stuff. A desk, where he was sitting now with a pencil, a pad of paper, and a glass of water. A circular rug on the floor. And on a table in the corner there was a small plant, half brown and half green.

Nothing could have said anything, thought Malik. It must just be my imagination.

The same small, raspy voice said, "That's good to know."

"What's good to know?" Malik asked the unseen voice.

"That you *have* an imagination," was the reply.

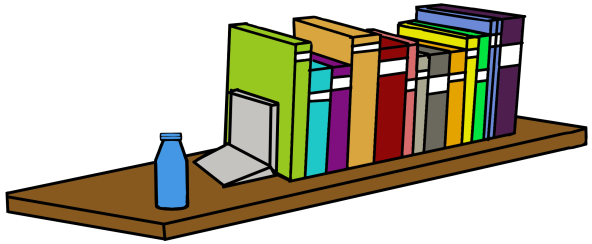
Malik shrugged and started reading the other half-finished story. This half story was about a blue bottle on a shelf that had something small inside it. You were supposed to guess at what the object was and write the rest of the story. Probably just a penny, thought Malik.

Suddenly there was a rattling sound. *Chi-chink, chinkita-chink.*

Malik looked around at his same plain room. The same bed. The same bureau. The same plant on a table in the corner … Was it *closer* now? The same shelves with the same books and games and… Was that blue bottle *always* there?

The thin, raspy voice said, "No. It's new."

And, again, the rattling sound. *Chi-chinkita, chinka-chink.*



Malik pinched himself. No, I am not dreaming. Good thing, he thought, I have to finish this story before I go to bed.

He wondered which story he would tackle.

The dull trees talking one. Trees don't talk. And if they did what would they say?

The raspy voice, very softly, but somehow even closer, said, "Maybe that they are *really* thirsty."

Or the blue bottle with something inside it. Who cares about some dumb penny?

The rattle was louder now. *Cha-chink. Cha-chink! Cha-CHINK!*

Sounds more like a quarter, thought Malik.

Suddenly, Malik realized that the room was answering his thoughts. The talking plant, the rattling blue bottle with something inside.

He looked right at the plant. Now that he really looked at it, maybe for the first time ever, he realized it was more like a small tree than a plant. And it looked like it needed water.

"What would you say if you could talk?" he asked the small tree.

The thin, parched voice, which seemed to come from nowhere, said, “First I would ask for a drink.”

“And then?” prompted Malik.

“*First* I would ask for a drink,” repeated the tree.

Easy enough, thought Malik. He grabbed the glass of water from his desk and poured it into the tree’s dirt.

The voice was still thin, but now less dry and raspy. “Thank you.”

Less dry and raspy, thought Malik, but before he could ask if the tree wanted more water, the tree said, “That was plenty, thanks. It takes some time for the water to get to my leaves.”

The blue bottle rattled again. *Chi-chinkita, chinka-chink.*

“Maybe you should look,” suggested the plant.

Malik began to sigh out of habit, but realized he was not bored. He was actually curious to learn what was inside this new blue bottle.

“I hope it's not a penny,” he said aloud.

“As do I,” said the tree.

So Malik picked up the surprisingly heavy blue bottle, tipped it over and shook the object into his hand. It was a small brown coin… a penny.

Disappointing, thought Malik.

“Look more closely,” prodded the tiny tree, which was now more green than brown and had perked up a bit.

Malik went to put the blue bottle down, but then realized he was no longer holding the blue bottle. It had disappeared. Right from his hand! He looked around, but the blue bottle was nowhere to be seen.

That's odd, thought Malik.

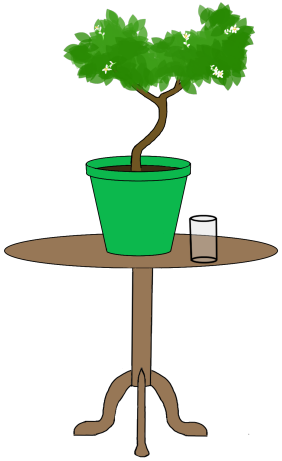
The tree said, "Not as odd as some other things."

Malik looked closely at the penny in his hand, but it *wasn't* a penny. It was a token.

A token that read "**ADMIT ONE**" and something else covered in grime. He wet his finger and rubbed the penny to read: "**First Street Hummingbird Garden**."

"What's a 'hummingbird garden?" he asked aloud, looking at the small tree, which by now had completely regained its green coloring. It even looked a bit taller, more tree-like.

The tree asked, "What do you *think* it is?"



The boy answered, "I guess like a butterfly garden, an enclosed area you can be with butterflies, but for hummingbirds."

The tree exclaimed, "Wouldn't *that* be lovely!" And, suddenly – pop, pop, pop – three tiny white flowers appeared on the tree.

Malik stared at the coin. "Admit One," he read aloud. "This hummingbird garden must have existed at one time." He continued to read: "First Street. The school is on 38th street so I bet there's a First Street in this town."

He placed the coin on his desk.

“Don’t go anywhere,” he said to the tree. “I have to go ask my Dad about this.”

Malik ran from the room.

He returned excited, talking at a very fast, breathless pace. “My Dad said that First Street used to be a giant amusement park with rides and parks. He was just a boy when they closed it down, and he doesn’t remember a hummingbird garden, and now it’s a broken down area with empty lots and piles of garbage, but he also said what you said, ‘Wouldn’t that be lovely!’ and-”

Malik stopped suddenly. The little tree was back in the corner, more brown than green. It had no white flowers. And its dirt was bone dry.

In a panic, he looked at his desk where he put the coin and … it was still there!

ADMIT ONE. First Street Hummingbird Garden.

He sighed a happy sigh and picked up his pen. He still had to complete the assignment, so he wanted to write this all down, quickly, before he forgot. Even though none of it had really happened. Or had it?

He wrote:

> *The first story was about two trees in the woods talking to each other. It was simply too dull for words.*

Then he stopped suddenly. Before he wrote another word, he had to do something. He had to water his small, thirsty tree.

Not Yet The End

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Two days later, the teacher was returning the assignments and said, "As you know, these were not graded and everyone who turned it in did a great job, but I want to say something about Malik's story."

The other children looked at Malik and, sadly to Malik, many expected he was in trouble.

One asked, "Did he do something wrong?"

The teacher laughed. "Well, yes and no. We were supposed to pick *one* story to finish and Malik kind of finished them *both* together. And…" he smiled at Malik, "…it's really quite wonderful."

Still Not Yet The End

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Twenty years later, Malik Callaway, now all grown up, walked up to the ticket taker at the brand new First Street Hummingbird Garden.

He had decided to rebuild the amusement park on First Street, complete with the rides and parks and, of course, the hummingbird garden. He filled it with small trees with white flowers, just like the one in his room while he was growing up.

The young man at the ticket counter asked him for his ticket and Malik smiled. He reached into his pocket and pulled out an old brown coin and handed it to the man.

The man said, "Sorry, sir, but we only accept tickets here, not coins or tokens."

Malik laughed. He said to the ticket taker, "I think you will see that *this* coin will work just fine."

The End

For more stories, writing activities (*very much like the ones Malik and his teacher used)* and reading lists, please visit: https://www.StuartStories.com

To view more illustrations by Gryffon, visit: https://www.instagram.com/wildwood.arts/