THE READING TREEHOUSE MYSTERIES

Volume 2

The Locker Note

&

The Missing Trophy

Two Illustrated Classroom Mysteries

Ages 8-10

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STORY ONE

The Locker Note

An Illustrated Classroom Mystery



CHAPTER 1

The Note in the Locker

Monday morning arrived with gray clouds, squeaky sneakers, and a hallway full of students who seemed only half awake.

Maya Patel liked Mondays more than most people did. A Monday felt like a fresh notebook page, clean and ready for something new. Of course, Mondays could also go wrong very quickly, especially if Leo Brooks arrived with an idea before breakfast had fully reached his brain.

Today, Leo was already waiting near the Room 12 cubbies with one hand inside his backpack and a deeply suspicious look on his face.

Maya slowed beside him. “What are you doing?”

Leo glanced around, then pulled out a granola bar with a crushed corner. “Checking for mysterious objects.”

Amir Johnson, who had just walked up with his folder neatly tucked under one arm, gave him a patient look. “Why would there be mysterious objects in your backpack?”

Leo lowered his voice. “Because last time there were glitter footprints in the treehouse.”

“That was one time,” Amir said.

“One time is enough to establish danger,” Leo replied.

Zoe Chen arrived a few seconds later with two colored pencils tucked behind one ear and a library book under her arm. “Please tell me we are not starting the week by investigating Leo’s backpack.”

“Not unless it starts glowing,” Maya said.

Leo zipped it. “So far, safe.”

The four friends walked into Room 12 together. The classroom looked bright and familiar, with morning light spreading across the desks and Mrs. Rivera writing the day's schedule on the board. Nibbles, the class hamster, sat in his cage chewing a cardboard tube as if he had never caused a homework disaster in his life.

Mrs. Rivera turned and smiled. "Good morning, everyone. Homework folders in the bin, then please come to the rug. We are starting something new today."

Leo froze. "New good or new responsibility?"

Mrs. Rivera raised one eyebrow. "Both."

Leo sighed. "That was my fear."

After everyone settled on the rug, Mrs. Rivera held up a stack of yellow papers decorated with small lanterns.

"This week," she said, "our school is beginning Kindness Week. We are going to practice noticing good things in others, not just big things, but small moments too."

Zoe sat up a little straighter. "Like helping someone?"

"Yes," Mrs. Rivera said. "Helping, listening, trying again, including someone, telling the truth, or being brave when something feels hard."

Maya liked the idea. Noticing something specific sounded harder than simply telling someone they were nice.

Mrs. Rivera passed out the papers. At the top, it said:

Kindness Week: Notice the Light

Underneath were little spaces where students could write kind things they noticed during the week.

Leo studied his page. "So this is like detective work, but for compliments."

"That is actually a good way to think about it," Mrs. Rivera said.

Leo looked pleased and slightly surprised. “I enjoy being accidentally brilliant.”

Amir glanced at the paper. “It says we should be specific.”

“Exactly,” said Mrs. Rivera. “Instead of writing, ‘You are nice,’ you might write, ‘You helped me pick up my pencils when they fell.’ Specific kindness helps people feel truly seen.”

Maya wrote one word in the corner of her paper: specific.

She was still thinking about it when a strange sound came from the hallway.

Clank.

It was not loud, but it was unusual enough that several heads turned.

Clank-clank.

Leo’s eyes widened. “That was not a normal school sound.”

Mrs. Rivera looked toward the open classroom door. “It sounded like a locker.”

Amir frowned. “The lockers near our room are not used this year.”

That was true. A row of old hallway lockers stood between Room 12 and the library, but most students used cubbies inside their classrooms now. The lockers were usually empty, except for one that stored extra board game boxes and another that had been jammed shut since October.

Mrs. Rivera stood. “Stay seated, please. I’ll check.”

But Leo was already half standing.

Maya grabbed the sleeve of his hoodie. “She said stay seated.”

“I am seated with interest,” Leo whispered, lowering himself again.

Mrs. Rivera stepped into the hallway. The class listened to the click of her shoes.

Then she appeared in the doorway. “Maya, Leo, Zoe, Amir, could you come here for a moment?”

Leo’s face lit up. “That is never boring.”

The four friends followed her into the hall. The lockers stood in a long row, dull blue and dented in places from years of backpacks bumping against them. One locker door near the middle sat slightly open.

Mrs. Rivera pointed to it. “Did any of you open this?”

They all shook their heads.

“No,” Maya said.

“I respect lockers from a distance,” Leo added.

Zoe stepped closer. “That one is usually closed.”

Amir looked at the door. “Maybe the latch is loose.”

Mrs. Rivera pulled the locker open a little wider. Inside, there were no books, no jackets, and no forgotten lunchboxes.

Just one folded yellow note.

It rested on the bottom shelf, neat and bright against the empty metal.

The familiar prickle of a mystery rose in Maya’s chest.

Mrs. Rivera picked up the note and unfolded it. Her expression softened as she read.

“What does it say?” Zoe asked.

Mrs. Rivera turned the paper so they could see.

In careful handwriting, the note said:

Someone noticed you tried again today. That matters.

Under the words was a tiny drawing of a paper lantern.

Nobody spoke right away.

The note was not scary or silly. It was simply kind.

Leo leaned closer. “That is mysterious, but in a nice way.”

Maya nodded. “There’s no name.”

“And no one uses this locker,” Amir said.

Zoe studied the lantern drawing. “It’s pretty.”

Mrs. Rivera looked thoughtful. “It may be part of Kindness Week. Perhaps someone wanted to leave an encouraging message.”

“But for who?” Leo asked.

“That is a good question,” Mrs. Rivera said.

Students still moved through the hallway, talking, laughing, and pulling backpacks onto their shoulders. Any one of them could have passed the locker before school.

Or left the note inside.

Mrs. Rivera folded the note. “I’ll keep this for now. If someone asks about it, we’ll return it.”

Leo looked disappointed. “We are not investigating?”

Mrs. Rivera gave him a small smile. “We are not accusing anyone of kindness, Leo.”

“That is fair,” he said. “But still, the locker made a clanking sound, and then we found a secret note. That feels like the start of something.”

Maya kept that thought to herself.

Back inside Room 12, the class was buzzing with questions.

“What was it?”

“Was there a mouse?”

“Was something broken?”

Leo opened his mouth, probably to make the story more dramatic, but Amir gave him a warning look.

Mrs. Rivera held up the note. “We found a kind message in one of the hallway lockers. It may be part of

Kindness Week, but we do not know who it was meant for yet."

"A secret note?" someone asked.

"A kind note," Mrs. Rivera corrected gently.

Tyler, who sat near the windows, leaned forward. "What did it say?"

Mrs. Rivera read it aloud.

Someone noticed you tried again today. That matters.

The room became quiet in a different way.

Max raised his hand. "Maybe it was for Leo. He tries again a lot."

A few kids laughed, not meanly, but Leo still made a face.

"I do have impressive retry energy," he said.

Tyler watched the note with an expression that was half curious and half hopeful. When he noticed Maya watching, he turned away.

During math, Maya tried to focus on fractions, but the hidden note kept nudging at her thoughts. It had not been left on a desk or handed to someone directly. Someone had chosen an unused locker.

Why hide a kind note?

At lunch, the four friends sat at their usual table near the window. Leo had already retold the locker discovery twice, although Maya noticed he was careful not to exaggerate too much.

"Maybe it was meant for someone who passed that locker," Zoe said, turning her juice box between her hands.

"Or someone who needed it," Amir said.

Leo nodded seriously. "So, everyone."

Maya opened her small notebook under the edge of the table. She wrote:

The Locker Note

Found in unused hallway locker

Yellow paper

Message: Someone noticed you tried again today. That matters.

Tiny paper lantern drawing

No name

Maybe connected to Kindness Week

Zoe leaned over. “Are we calling this a case?”

“Not yet.” Maya tapped the title with her pencil.

Leo pointed at the title. “You wrote a case title.”

“It is a possible case title.”

“That is how cases begin,” Leo said. “With denial.”

Amir looked toward the hallway doors. “We should wait. One note might just be one note.”

Maya nodded, even though she felt the mystery tugging at her. Amir was right. One note did not mean a pattern.

Not yet.

After lunch, the class went to the library for book exchange. Mrs. Patel had set up a Kindness Week display with books about friendship, courage, and helping others. Paper lanterns hung from strings above the shelves, swaying lightly whenever someone walked past.

Zoe went to return her book near the front desk. A moment later, she came back holding a hardcover mystery with a startled look on her face.

“Maya,” she whispered.

Maya turned. “What?”

Zoe opened the book.

Tucked between the pages was another folded yellow note.

The same color.

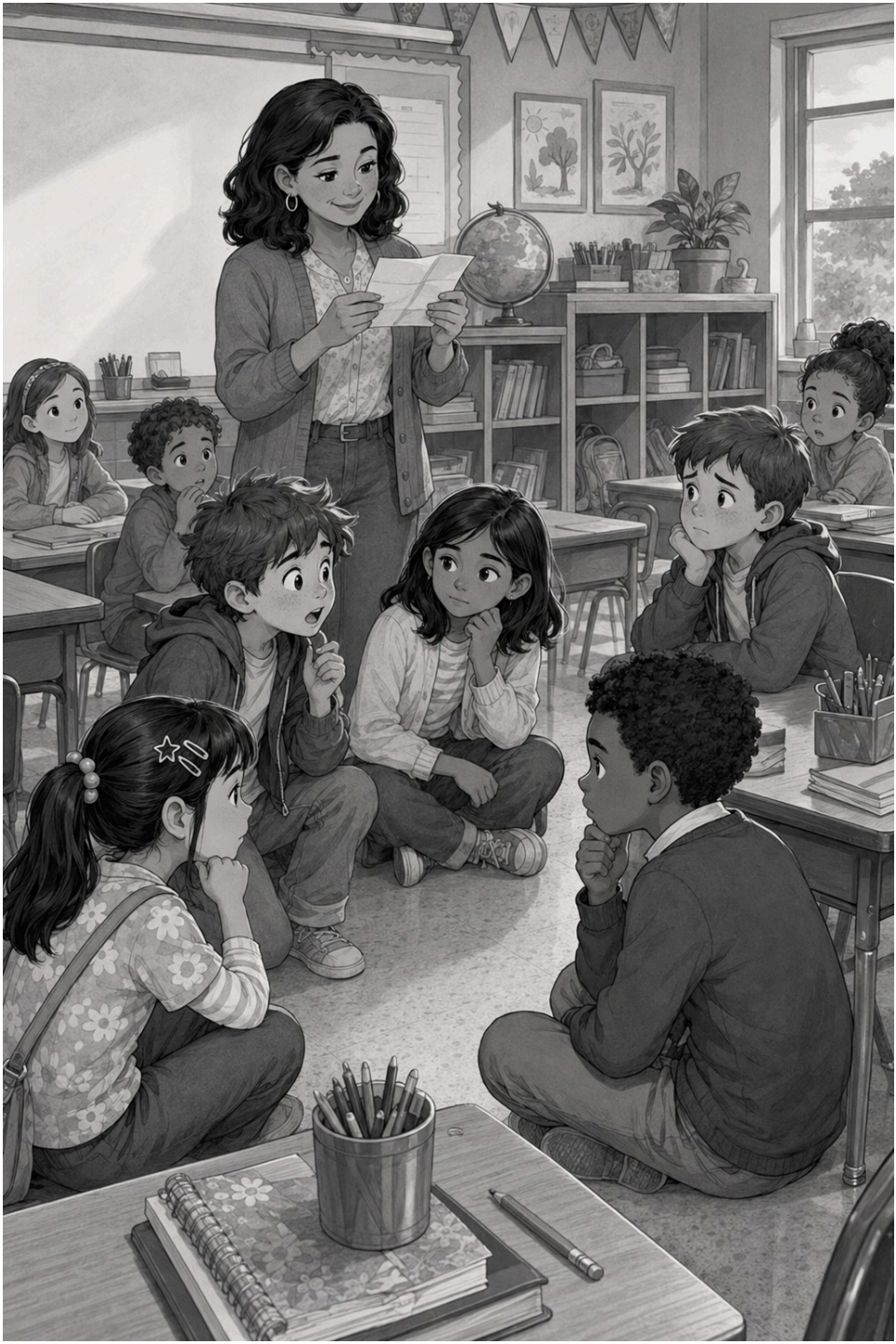
The same neat handwriting.

The same tiny paper lantern at the bottom.

Maya's heart gave a quick, excited jump.
Leo leaned in. "Read it."
Zoe unfolded the note and read:

Your ideas are quieter than others, but they are still important.

The four friends stared at the second note.
Then Leo whispered, "Okay."
Amir tipped his chin toward Maya's notebook.
Maya flipped to a clean page.
One note could be a coincidence.
Two were harder to ignore.
The Locker Note had become a case.



CHAPTER 2

The Wrong Owner

By the time library period ended, the second yellow note had become the most interesting thing in the entire school.

At least, it felt that way to Maya.

She kept seeing it in her mind as the class lined up near the library doors. The neat handwriting. The tiny paper lantern. The message that sounded as if it had been written for someone specific, but no one knew who.

Your ideas are quieter than others, but they are still important.

Leo walked beside her with his hands shoved into his hoodie pocket, looking unusually thoughtful.

“That note could be for a lot of people,” he whispered.

Maya nodded. “That’s what makes it tricky.”

“It could be for Zoe,” he said. “She has ideas.”

“I am standing right here,” Zoe said from behind them.

“Quiet ideas,” Leo added quickly. “Important quiet ideas.”

Zoe gave him an unimpressed look. “Nice save. Not perfect, but decent.”

Amir adjusted the books in his arms. “The problem is we do not know whether the notes are meant for whoever finds them or for someone else.”

“That is a very Amir thing to say,” Leo replied.

“It is also the main question,” Maya said.

Mrs. Patel stood near the front desk, watching the class leave the library. Her eyes moved briefly to the book in Zoe’s hands, the one that had held the second

note. Maya wondered if the librarian already knew something, but Mrs. Patel only smiled and said, “Enjoy your reading, everyone.”

Back in Room 12, Mrs. Rivera asked the students to place their new books inside their desks and take out their writing journals. Usually, Maya liked writing time. Today, her pencil rested above the page while her mind stayed with the notes.

Across the room, Tyler kept glancing toward Zoe’s desk.

That made Maya look too.

Zoe had slipped the second note into her folder, but one corner of yellow paper was still visible. Tyler noticed it. So did Max. So did Lily, who sat behind Zoe and noticed almost everything.

After a few minutes, Lily leaned forward. “Is that another locker note?”

Zoe hesitated. “Not from the locker.”

Leo turned around too quickly. “Technically, it is a library note.”

Mrs. Rivera looked up from her desk. “Leo.”

He turned back around. “Sorry. Whispering with accuracy.”

Lily’s eyes widened. “There’s another one?”

Now three more students looked over.

The room shifted around them, the way a flock of birds seems to decide all at once whether to fly.

Mrs. Rivera noticed too.

“Class,” she said gently, “let’s pause for a moment.”

Everyone turned toward her.

Mrs. Rivera held out her hand, and Zoe brought the second note to her. She read it silently, then looked around the room with a thoughtful expression.

“This is another kind message,” she said. “It was found in a library book, and we do not yet know who wrote it or who it was meant for.”

“Can you read it?” Max asked.

Mrs. Rivera glanced at Zoe, who nodded.

Mrs. Rivera read the words aloud.

Your ideas are quieter than others, but they are still important.

A soft murmur moved through the room.

“That sounds like Zoe,” Lily said.

Zoe blinked. “Me?”

“You draw ideas all the time,” Lily said.

Zoe’s cheeks turned pink. “I guess.”

“It could be for Amir,” Leo said. “His ideas are quiet because they are organized before they come out.”

Amir looked at him. “That is strangely accurate.”

“It could be for anyone,” Tyler said.

His voice was not loud, but it carried.

Mrs. Rivera nodded. “Exactly. And that is why we should be careful. A kind note is not something to fight over or claim too quickly.”

Tyler looked down at his journal.

Maya watched him again. There was something in his face she could not quite name. Not jealousy. Not exactly. More like he wanted the note to be for him but did not want anyone to know he wanted that.

Mrs. Rivera placed both notes on her desk. “For now, I’ll keep these safe. If the writer wants to explain, they can. If not, we can still appreciate the message.”

Leo’s hand went halfway up.

Mrs. Rivera smiled. “Yes, Leo?”

“Are anonymous notes allowed during Kindness Week?”

“That depends,” Mrs. Rivera said. “Kind anonymous notes can be lovely, but they should never make people feel confused, excluded, or uncomfortable.”

Leo nodded. “So mystery kindness has rules.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Rivera said. “Most things do.”

Amir whispered, “I support that.”

At recess, the two notes followed them outside without actually being there.

Everyone seemed to be talking about them.

Near the swings, Max said he thought the first note was probably for him because he had kept trying during math even after getting two answers wrong. Lily said the second note was probably for Zoe because it sounded artistic. Ben said he hoped he found a note next because “it would be nice to be mysteriously appreciated.”

Tyler stood near the basketball court, bouncing a ball once, then catching it, then bouncing it again.

Maya walked over with Leo, Zoe, and Amir close behind.

“Hi,” she said.

Tyler looked up. “Hi.”

Leo gave a small wave that somehow looked awkward and dramatic at the same time.

Maya nodded toward the ball. “Are you playing?”

“Not really.” Tyler held the basketball against his side. “Just bouncing.”

Zoe shifted her folder from one arm to the other. “You seemed interested in the notes.”

Tyler shrugged. “Everyone is.”

“That’s true,” Amir said.

Tyler looked across the playground, where a few students were still talking near the swings. “It’s just

weird, I guess. A note says someone noticed something good, but nobody knows who it's for."

Maya nodded. "That part is complicated."

Tyler kicked lightly at a wood chip near his shoe. "If it's not for you, then it feels like maybe nobody noticed you."

The words were quiet, but they landed heavily.

Leo's expression softened. For once, he did not have a joke ready.

Zoe looked at Tyler. "I don't think the note means that."

"I know," Tyler said quickly. "I'm not upset."

But he sounded upset, and everyone knew it.

Before Maya could answer, the recess whistle blew. Tyler bounced the ball once more, passed it to Ben, and walked toward the classroom line.

Maya stayed where she was for a second.

Amir stood beside her. "This is becoming more than a mystery."

"Yeah," Maya said.

Leo sighed. "I miss when clues were just clues."

After school, the Reading Treehouse meeting began with a serious problem.

Ravi had taken the good crackers.

"He said they were for dragon training," Maya explained as she climbed into the treehouse.

Leo stared at the snack box in disappointment. "Ravi continues to be my greatest rival."

Zoe settled onto the rug with the case notebook. "Focus."

"I can focus while grieving," Leo said.

Amir pulled a pencil from his pocket. "We need to list what we know."

Maya opened to a fresh page and wrote:

Under it, she made two columns.

Note 1

Found in unused hallway locker.

Message: Someone noticed you tried again today. That matters.

Symbol: tiny paper lantern.

Note 2

Found inside library book.

Message: Your ideas are quieter than others, but they are still important.

Symbol: tiny paper lantern.

Zoe drew the lantern symbol beside both notes. “It’s the same drawing.”

“Same person?” Leo asked.

“Probably,” Amir said. “Same paper, same handwriting, same symbol.”

Maya tapped her pencil gently against the page. “But we still do not know who the notes are for.”

Leo leaned back against a pillow. “Maybe they are for whoever finds them.”

Zoe frowned. “But the second one was in my library book. I didn’t choose that book until today.”

“Maybe the writer knew you would choose it,” Leo said.

Amir stared at him. “That is unlikely.”

“Not impossible.”

“Many unlikely things are not impossible.”

Leo pointed at him. “Exactly why mysteries exist.”

Maya smiled a little, then looked back at the notes. “Mrs. Rivera said kind notes should not make people feel confused or left out.”

“Tyler felt left out,” Zoe said.

“Or worried that he was left out,” Amir added.

Leo looked thoughtful. “Which feels almost the same.”

That was a very Leo way to say something wise.

Maya wrote:

Problem: kind notes are making some kids happy, but they may also make others feel left out.

The treehouse went quiet. Outside, Ravi shouted something about dragons needing more crackers.

Zoe studied her drawing of the tiny lantern. “Why a paper lantern?”

The lantern was small but deliberate: a rounded top, a little handle, and tiny lines that made it look lit from inside.

“Maybe it means light,” Amir said.

“Kindness Week is called Notice the Light,” Maya said.

Leo sat up. “So the notes are like little lights.”

Zoe smiled. “That’s actually nice.”

“I am having a thoughtful day,” Leo said.

Maya wrote:

Lantern = light? Kind words? Noticing people?

Amir looked over the page. “We need more information before we investigate anyone.”

“Agreed,” Maya said. “No suspects yet.”

Leo looked mildly disappointed. “Can we have persons of curiosity?”

“No,” Amir said.

“People of interest?”

“No.”

“Humans we are gently wondering about?”

Zoe laughed. “Maybe that one.”

Maya closed the notebook halfway. “For now, we watch for another note.”

“And if we find one?” Leo asked.

Maya tapped the two lantern drawings with her pencil.

“Then it’s officially a pattern.”

The next morning, the pattern arrived sooner than anyone expected.

It was sitting on Maya’s desk.

A folded yellow note.

Same paper.

Same careful handwriting.

Same tiny lantern at the bottom.

Her breath caught as Leo, Zoe, and Amir gathered around her.

She unfolded the note.

The message read:

You helped someone feel less alone yesterday. That was kind.

For a second, Maya could not speak.

Leo whispered, “Okay. That one feels very specific.”

Amir looked across the room.

Tyler had just walked in, carrying his backpack on one shoulder. He glanced at Maya’s desk, saw the yellow note, and stopped.

His face changed.

Then he looked away.

Maya stared at the note in her hand.

This time, she had no doubt.

The lantern notes were not random.

END OF SAMPLE

The mystery is just getting started.

Maya, Leo, Zoe, and Amir have only found the first clues. Find out what happens in Chapter 3, “The Lantern Mark,” and follow the friends all the way to the solution of The Locker Note.

Then join them for a second classroom mystery in the same book, The Missing Trophy.

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