

The Mr. Rhee Challenge

by Lee P. Sauer

MacKenzie read the note aloud: “The person you seek is a mystery.”

“Well, duh!” said Madison. “That helps us not at all.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure,” said MacKenzie, putting a finger to her mouth. “We have the whole puzzle. We just have to put the pieces together.”

On her bed, MacKenzie placed a name tag with nothing written on it, a book on phonics, and the note. “The answer has got to be here,” she said thoughtfully. “Mr. Rhee said this note is the final clue.”

Madison and MacKenzie’s teacher had issued a challenge: identify the person in the clues and win the right to move your desk anywhere in the classroom. MacKenzie wanted to sit next to Madison. She was determined to win.

Once again, she read the note: “The person you seek is a mystery “

The next day at lunch, MacKenzie and Madison discussed the challenge with their friends.

“What if it’s somebody we never heard of?” said Madison, poking her finger jello.

“Mr. Rhee wouldn’t do that,” said Chase, the computer expert. “It’s got to be somebody famous—like Bill Gates.”

“Who?” said Brant.

“Excuse me,” said Chase. “Somebody like Pikachu.”

“Ahhh, Pokeman!” said Brant. He scrunched down in his chair and made chirping noises.

MacKenzie put a finger to her mouth, “I think it’s somebody in school. Maybe even someone in our class.”

Silence fell as the friends thought alone.

“My brain hurts,” said Madison suddenly. “The clues tell us nothing. I mean, an empty name tag, a book on boring old phonics, and a note that says we’re looking for a ‘mystery?’ C’mon! Any way you add nothing, you still have nothing. I give up!”

“The answer is here,” said MacKenzie, softly.

“It’s probably very simple,” said Chase in a far-away voice.

The two friends looked at each other. MacKenzie turned away. Chase wanted to win as badly as she!

“Well,” said Madison, “We’d better figure it out soon. The contest ends right after recess.”

“Ooooo! Recess!” said Brant. “Cheep, chu, chu cheep!”

Outside, while her friends raced in a game of tag, MacKenzie stared at the clues. She went over every word Mr. Rhee said when he issued the challenge. What was she missing?

The bell rang.

“Did you figure it out?” said Madison when she ran to MacKenzie’s side.

“No,” said MacKenzie. “I give up.”

As the friends hung up their coats, they passed the new second grade teacher.

“Hi, Mrs. um Mrs. ” fumbled Madison.

MacKenzie had forgotten the teacher’s name, too. She quickly looked at the nameplate on the door. “Hi, Mrs. Robinson,” she said, coming to Madison’s rescue.

MacKenzie stopped.

“What?” asked Madison.

A finger crossed MacKenzie’s mouth. She strode down the hall. At each door, she read the nameplate aloud:

“Miss Annabelle Adams

“Mrs. Cora Humdinger ”

Madison, running to keep up, bumped into MacKenzie when her friend stopped in front of their classroom. MacKenzie pointed to the nameplate. “Mr. Albert Rhee,” she said triumphantly.

She turned to Madison. “I know who the mystery person is!”

Grabbing Madison’s hand, she ran into the room.

“I know the answer!” she announced.

Chase looked up. The buzz in the room fell.

“All right, everybody,” said Mr. Rhee. “Take your seats.”

The students shuffled into order. All eyes stayed with MacKenzie.

“So, MacKenzie solved our mystery?” asked the teacher. “Before she reveals her answer, does anyone else have a guess?”

“I do,” said Brant.

“Yes?” said Mr. Rhee.

“It’s ahhhhhh” Brant looked around the room. “It’s Bill Gates!”

“I’m surprised you know who Bill Gates is, Brant,” said Mr. Rhee. “Good guess, but wrong.

“Anyone else?”

The students stopped wiggling to avoid attention.

“Okay, MacKenzie,” said Mr. Rhee. “Tell us what you’ve found.”

MacKenzie stood. “I kept asking myself, ‘What’s missing?’” she said. “Then I realized—it’s the name on the name tag!”

“Well, duh!” said Madison.

“It sounds simple, and it is,” said MacKenzie. “The other two clues point to the answer.”

MacKenzie picked up the book. “What’s phonics?” she asked.

“Boring!” said Brant. The class laughed.

“Besides that,” said MacKenzie.

“It’s sounds that make up words,” said Chase, leaning forward. “Like, bear and bare are different words with different meanings. But, in phonics, they’re the same because they sound the same.”

“Exactly!” said MacKenzie. She pulled out the note and handed it to Madison. “Read this,” she said.

Madison’s head moved left to right. She nodded and looked up. “Okay, now what?” she asked.

“No,” said MacKenzie, “Read it aloud.”

Madison sighed. “The person you seek is a mystery.”

“Again,” said MacKenzie.

“The person you seek is a mystery.”

“Again,” said MacKenzie.

“The person you seek is a” Madison dropped her hands. “Oh, come on,” she said. “Just tell us who it is!”

“You’ve already said the answer,” said MacKenzie.

“I have?” asked Madison.

“Say the last word on the note,” said MacKenzie. “And listen!”

“Mystery,” said Madison.

“Again.”

“Mystery.”

“Again.”

“Just tell us!” shouted Madison.

MacKenzie turned slowly to the teacher.

“The person we seek is a Mister Rhee.”

“Very clever,” said Mr. Rhee.