



The Bag That Quacked



Abby leaned forward and stared.

The new teacher's bag was moving.

Abby peered closer. What did teachers have in their bags? Books, probably. And colored markers. Maybe an electric pencil sharpener. But none of those things could move.

At least Abby hoped not.

If an electric pencil sharpener was fighting its way out of that bag, she didn't want to be in the way when it escaped.

Abby looked over at the teacher. She didn't seem to have noticed the bag. She was writing her name on the board in curly purple letters:

Mrs. Melvino



Next to Abby, Lianna was staring at the bag, too. "Hey!" she whispered. "Maybe it's one of those little dogs!"

Oh. Abby hoped not. She had seen those dogs, the kind people carried around in hand-bags, with little pink bows on their heads.

Last year, Melanie had thought it was cute to bring her poodle puppy in her backpack for show-and-tell.

Abby sighed. If she had a dog, she would never put it in a bag.



She didn't have a dog, though. Because Mom and Dad said no. They said no every single birthday and every single Christmas.

They said no to dogs and cats and rabbits. They even said no to goldfish. Because it was important to keep the house tidy and calm, and pets weren't good at that. Because dogs chewed newspapers, and cats clawed curtains, and even a bowl of goldfish was too messy when you really thought about it, with the water slopping everywhere and the smelly fish food, not to mention how their googly eyes staring at you and their endless swimming around and around would start to drive you crazy before long.



That's what Mom said, anyway.

Abby looked at Mrs. Melvino. She didn't look like a dog-in-a-bag kind of person. She didn't look like the kind of person who would be driven crazy by goldfish swimming around, at least not very quickly.

Mrs. Melvino didn't look like any teacher Abby had ever seen. She had wild, curly hair and rectangular glasses with purple frames. She was wearing a long, flowing skirt with funny little bells hanging off of it, and dangly earrings that jingled when she moved, like the wind chimes Mom hung up out back.

She looked like the kind of teacher who wouldn't mind if you suddenly asked why her bag was moving.

So Abby did.

"My bag? Oh dear, yes." Mrs. Melvino raised her eyebrows. "Of course, it's not really a *bag*."

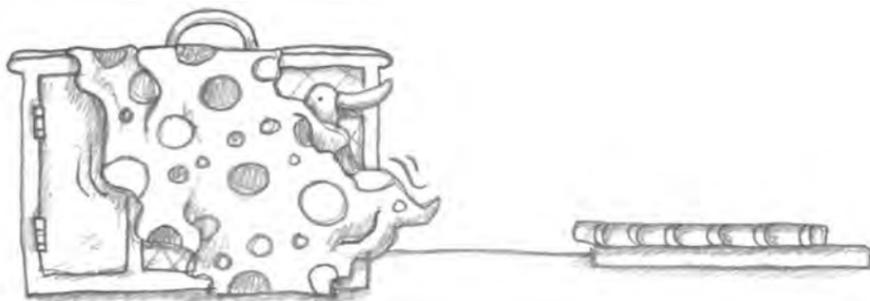
Abby looked closer. She was right. It wasn't a bag at all. It was a spotted cloth, draped over something.

A cage.

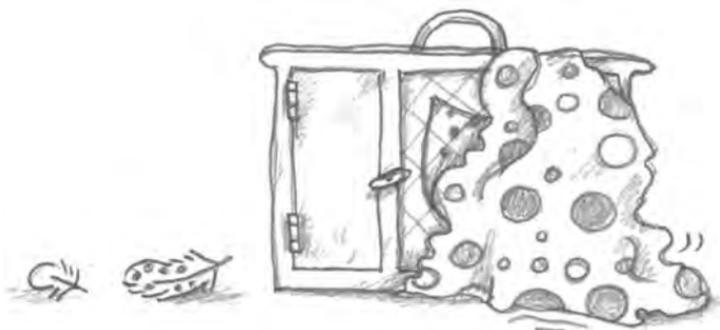
She could see now,
because the cloth was
coming off. Because
something was nibbling
and tugging and pulling at
it from inside.



Something with a smooth, orange beak.



Something with speckled brown feathers.



“QUACK!”

Abby jumped.

Melanie squealed. “What *is* that?”

No one replied. Because anyone could see what the cage thing was. It wasn’t a little dog or an escaping electric pencil sharpener. And that was a relief.

But it was weird, all the same.

Because it was a duck.

A duck that was ruffling its feathers and staring out at them with bright, beady eyes as if to say, *What are you looking at?*

